RODRIGO POLANCO

HANS URS VON BALTHASAR

I

THE STRUCTURING AXES OF HIS THEOLOGY

foreword by

ÁNGEL CORDOVILLA



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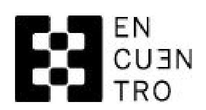
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To my parents,
with gratitude and affection

Foreword
Reading Hans Urs von Balthasar

Ángel Cordovilla Pérez

In the summer of 2004 I knocked on the door of the house at 42 Arnold Böcklinstrasse in Basel where Hans Urs von Balthasar lived for at least the last 25 years of his life and where he died on June 26, 1988, two days before being created a cardinal of the Catholic Church. I wanted to visit the tomb of the Swiss theologian, as I had done a few years ago in Innsbruck with the tomb of another great German theologian who for some time had been friends and close collaborators: Karl Rahner. At that time I did not remember that Balthasar was buried in Lucerne in the family pantheon, however, the trip from Heidelberg to Basel was not in vain. Thanks to this oversight, I had the opportunity to visit the house where Balthasar lived his last years and where the memories of his daily life were still preserved: the gallery where he prayed the divine office; the office where he worked with the illustration of the crucified Christ by Matthias Grünewald above the door; the monochromatic library of sources that he always kept at hand behind his desk; the room where he kept the multicolored library of secondary bibliography and monographs sent to him by authors; and above all, I was able to greet and meet Cornelia Capol, who had been his secretary and faithful collaborator throughout his life. I had a friendly conversation with her that went on for some time. I was left with the impression of breathing a certain nostalgia or melancholy because the interest aroused by the figure and work of von Balthasar in the Spanish-speaking world was not being reciprocated in the context of the author's birthplace. Added to this was the decision to have to sell this historic house in order to remove funds to create a modern archive where the spiritual and intellectual heritage of the Swiss theologian could be kept safe and efficiently. Although I did not have the privilege of meeting Hans Urs von Balthasar personally, I was at least fortunate enough to get to know the house where he spent the most

fruitful years of his theological career.

Since this meeting I have asked myself if Frau Capol's perception of the reception of Balthasar's work is really in line with reality, thus confirming in some way the statement that the Lucerne theologian himself had made in his *Epilogue* about his theological work as a bottle thrown into the sea in the hope that someday it would be picked up and read by someone. My experience is that more and more of us have picked up that bottle, opened it and have been enriched by reading this unclassifiable author. Even today, after having dedicated some years to the specific study of his works for my doctoral thesis, his pages continue to enlighten me in theological work. His influence on contemporary theology is more and more evident, although it will never have the impact and significance that, for example, the theological work of his counterpart Karl Rahner has had. There are many reasons for this imbalance, if one can call it that, which probably have to do with the celebration of the Second Vatican Council and the ups and downs of its reception, but not least is the fact that Rahner was a professor and professional theologian, while Balthasar never wanted to place himself in this situation. Precisely the Swiss author fled from school theology; he did not want to be a professor and his entire theological project was conducted through the Johannes Verlag publishing house created by him and financed with his family's money in order to publish the work of Adrienne von Speyr, translate theological classics and edit his own work. This decision, which gave Balthasar an unparalleled freedom, in accordance with his creative capacity, also had its consequences, especially with regard to the possibility of influencing theological studies as a whole, oriented towards academic training and the systematic study of theological science.

The novelty of Balthasar's theological approach and the literary form of his theology have meant that its influence and repercussion have been much slower. There are already statements that have become part of the theological acquis and to a large extent, though not exclusively, we can say that they are due to him: the primacy of the transcendental of beauty and the existence of the various theological

styles in theological epistemology; the eternal Trinitarian foundation of the divine missions; the centrality of the *triduum paschale* in theology; the theology of representation and of the admirable exchange in the understanding of Christian salvation; the inseparability of dogmatic theology and spirituality or the theology of the saints as the source of theological endeavor; the Gospel as the norm and fundamental form of Christian spirituality.... We could continue with the enumeration of particular aspects of his theology that have already passed into the general current of academic theology, although this is not our intention now. The second volume of the work we prologue by the Chilean theologian Rodrigo Polanco explains and shows precisely the importance and fruitfulness of these themes in the Balthasarian work.

The question that remains is not about some particular aspect of his theology, but whether or not his "theological system", we could say, his fundamental intuition, has been received or not. At the Rimini *Meeting* in 2002, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger noted that while many details of his fundamental work *Theological Aesthetics* had been accepted in the theological sphere, the basic approach that constitutes the essential element of the whole has not been taken on board at all. That essential element is the conviction that the impact provoked by the beauty of Christ manifested in death and resurrection produces a knowledge more real and profound than mere rational deduction. Beauty provokes a corresponding form of knowledge that is better suited to the object of theology than pure rational deduction or historical investigation. These are necessary, but radically insufficient. For this reason, a few years later at the International Congress held in Rome in 2005 on the occasion of the centenary of his birth already as pope he addressed in these terms to those of us who were his participants: "I believe that his theological reflection maintains intact to this day a profound timeliness and still provokes many, guided by his indisputable authority, to delve ever more deeply into the depths of the mystery of faith."

Balthasar's theological work is not manualistic, nor can it be understood from the specific subjects of the different theological

treatises. Since his student days, he had a certain aversion to "scholastic theology", which he compared to a desert through which he had no choice but to travel. But this does not mean that his work lacks a systematic perspective, as Rodrigo Polanco has explained and made clear in this first volume of his work dedicated to the study of the structuring axes of Balthasar's theology. Fascinated by a center that is the revelation of God in the person of Jesus Christ in the most concrete of history in the paschal mystery, the theologian from Lucerne unfolds the height, breadth and depth of this mystery around the three transcendentals, beginning with the transcendental of beauty (*Theological Aesthetics*), asking himself about the capacity of the human being to contemplate the unique and singular figure of Jesus Christ revealing the glory of God and the destiny of the world. This perception of the glory of God in the person of Christ granted by the very fact of his manifestation is the starting point of the story of a drama provoked by the encounter of two freedoms that are the condition of possibility of the action and the outcome of the history of salvation (*Theodramatics*). This dramatic action allows us to enter into the logic of God's action and revelation, finally attending to the question of truth, the truth of the world and the truth of God revealed in the flesh of Christ and unfolded in all its newness by the Holy Spirit (*Theological*). Despite the temptation to want to fit this trilogy into a formally Trinitarian perspective, as if the first part were centered on the person of the Father, the second on the Son and the third on the Spirit, Balthasar himself rejected this systematization. Balthasar's theological work is not Trinitarian in its formal structure, but rather in the core of its content and in the development of its fundamental themes. We find ourselves before one of the most original proposals of twentieth century theology, where no one until then had attempted to articulate from the three transcendentals the fundamental content of theology, and even less so beginning with the forgotten transcendental of beauty.

The work of the Chilean professor and theologian Rodrigo Polanco that we now prologue offers us the fruitfulness of this theological program, showing in a first volume the influences and fundamental

presuppositions that converge in the Balthasarian proposal (*Hans Urs von Balthasar I. Structuring axes of his theology*), to expose in a second volume the unfolding of the most significant content of the Swiss author from the triple articulation that we have already commented above (*Hans Urs von Balthasar II. Central aspects of his Trilogy*). We find ourselves before a magnificent introduction to Balthasar's thought whose most significant value is to provide an organic vision of the whole work of the Swiss thinker . Rodrigo Polanco has a broad, exhaustive, rigorous knowledge of the whole work of Balthasar to which he has dedicated many years of his work and study, as well as the most important and significant secondary bibliography that he exposes for those who want to deepen in a more concrete aspect of the *Balthasarian opus*. It is obvious that a monograph of this style can never replace the direct reading of the author's work, but for the reader uninitiated in Balthasar's work it constitutes a commendable guide. This book will perform its function if in the end it enlivens the reader's desire to confront directly the captivating, beautiful, provocative and profound style of the Swiss theologian. Because in the end, reading directly from the classics, from a modern classic like Balthasar, is what can ignite in readers a passion for theology, a passion for welcoming and thinking about the paradoxical and gratuitous revelation of God in the person of Christ and the gift of the Spirit. The introduction to theology must be done through pedagogical manuals and articulated and systematic treatises that offer us the fundamental content in a clear and orderly way. But theology can only be learned in the shadow of the great ones, because they are the only ones who can ignite in each one of us a passion for God and for all that he has given of himself when human reason has opened itself to this incomprehensible mystery in the singularity of his historical revelation.

I did not visit Balthasar's grave. After saying goodbye to Cornelia Capol and giving me a copy of the book *Zu seinem Werk*, a consecrated woman from the Community of St. John accompanied me to the cemetery where Adrienne von Speyr was buried, a decisive person in the development of the theology of the Swiss master and fundamental

in the mission shared from his mystical experiences and revelations. There, before the tomb of the person who constituted the other half of the Balthasarian work, I prayed that this will no longer be a bottle thrown into the sea, but a source of inspiration for theologians in the future. We trust that the publication of this work will serve this purpose.

Introduction

Target

Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988) is an author so erudite and prolific in his literary creation that it is not easy to find, neither in the production of Balthasar himself, nor in the literature about him, a unitary text that exposes or explains in a sufficiently complete and global way - but at the same time synthetic and thinking of people who are not experts in his work - the sources and the cardinal structure of his thought. His work of "synthesis" is the *Theological Trilogy*, but it consists of 16 voluminous volumes (about 7,000 pages in total). He was aware of this. For this reason, throughout his life, he wrote, every ten years, some brief texts with an explanatory look at his works of the last decade and his theological project[1] ; and he also tried, on some occasions, to expose the core of his thought starting from some central aspect of his theological proposal[2] . However, he never wrote a general and complete volume in which he explained in a more detailed way his theological project[3] . And, in the same way, if we then ask ourselves about a text written by another author, in which the structure of Balthasar's thought is exposed in a more or less complete and general way, in order to appropriate some keys to better understand his theology, the answer must be, equally, "it is not easy to find such a book", much less, in Spanish language.

The work we now offer wishes to fill this void and hopes to be an affirmative answer to that last question. It wants to introduce the reader to the theological thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar starting with his *Trilogy,* as the masterpiece and summit of his productivity - composed of *Gloria*, *Theodramatica* and *Theologica*, plus the *Epilogue* -, which, in turn, gathers in a good way all his previous production. It is, in a few words, to show the general mood of his person and his life, to expose the essential lines of his theological thought and to deliver some fundamental criteria for its reading and understanding. And the choice of the *Trilogy* is due to the fact that, among the many possibilities to present the configuration of his thought, these volumes,

as his work of synthesis, explicitly try to expose the basic structure that cements his theology and thus pristinely show his way of understanding the mystery of revelation together with the response of faith and understanding of it on the part of every human being.

The choice of the *Trilogy* is also justified by the fact that Balthasar himself has affirmed that his "Theological Trilogy" is "the fundamental plan, the preoccupation of a lifetime"[4] . Written between 1961 and 1987, it reflects the depths of his thought and the result of many years of study, contemplation, apostolic dedication and fruitful dialogue with many authors. In 1965, he himself explained that gradually "the idea of presenting the immensity of Christianity, as much for the man of today as for the of yesterday, in a somehow complete picture emerged. In such a way that he matured the plan of a trilogy"[5] that, happily, he was able to conclude, with an *Epilogue*, a year before his death. It is a difficult, complex work, but it expresses very well the synthesis he reached at the end of his life and thus fulfills what we are looking for: to find a complete exposition of his thought structure.

Content

This introductory book is divided into two fundamental parts. A first section with some basic aspects that allow a better understanding of the person and theology of Balthasar; and a second section with the structuring axes of his *Trilogy*. The first part, entitled *Introductory Aspects for Understanding Balthasar,* is divided into three chapters. The first chapter, entitled *Intellectual Biography of Balthasar,* is a presentation of the author, starting from his elementary biographical data, which also shows the multiple sources from which he draws and which later appear harmoniously integrated in his theology. Next, the relationship between philosophy and theology that structures his deepest thought is presented, and the way in which his theological synthesis is based on the transcendentals of being: beauty, goodness and truth, thus resulting in a *Theological Aesthetics,* a *Theo-dramatics* and a *Theo-logic*, is reviewed. In the second chapter, entitled *A global look at the Trilogy,* a general presentation of the content treated in each of the 16 volumes of the *Trilogy* is made, in order to be able to

perceive more globally Balthasar's intent. This is a look at each of the three parts - as a whole - and then a synthetic look at each book in particular. And, in the third chapter, entitled *"Two Halves of a Whole. The theological relationship between Hans Urs von Balthasar and Adrienne von Speyr*, out of fairness and honesty to Balthasar himself, the theological relationship between him and Adrienne von Speyr is expounded in a little more detail, since their work is inseparable. It is a matter of indicating Balthasar's own perception of Adrienne von Speyr's charisma and his involvement in her work, in order to ponder the importance of A. von Speyr's influence on him, with the result of a joint work. All this forms the first section of the text.

Then, the second part, entitled *The structuring axes of his theological proposal,* is also composed of three chapters that, *roughly speaking,* develop the three transcendentals that structure the *Trilogy*. Predictably, in order to properly understand Balthasar's theological project - and thus the more particular aspects of his theology - it is necessary and always important to be able to interpret his theology in harmony and integrated with these three structuring transcendentals of his work. For this reason, the fourth chapter, entitled *A Fundamental Theology from Theological Aesthetics,* explains what a theological aesthetics consists of, particularly understood from the perception-form relationship. Here we discover a true fundamental/dogmatic theology, with a great capacity to integrate all truth, and of universal value. The fifth chapter, entitled *Christianity understood as a "Theo-dramatics",* then develops what is understood by theodramatics and its internal relationship with theological aesthetics. Then, it explains the meaning and the reason for the use of theatrical instruments and their relationship with the revelation of God and theology; as well as the way of intellection of the revelation from the categories of dramatics. The central point of harmonization between the two is the profound correlation between theatrical role and Christian mission. And, the sixth chapter, entitled *Philosophy that sustains Balthasar's theology,* proposes the most salient and characteristic points of Balthasar's philosophy. It begins by exposing his distinctive approach to a philosophy read from theology, without ceasing to be strictly

philosophy, and then exposes the authors who have most influenced his thought and a couple of themes that are especially characteristic of his philosophy.

It ends with a *brief retrospective look,* which makes a concise final balance on Balthasar's attempt. There one can appreciate the need to understand his theological project and each of its particular themes, always from the basilar structure of his thought, anchored in the transcendentals of being.

A *suggested bibliography* is included at the end of the work, that is, a selection of books and articles that can help the reader to continue deepening his understanding of Balthasar. It is a brief and select list of biographical works and general introductions to his life, work and theology, so that the reader who so desires, can delve more deeply into the topics that have aroused a particular interest, before - or together with - going directly to the works of Balthasar. A couple of readings, both by Balthasar and by other authors, are also recommended for each of the chapters. Like any selection, it is not infallible, and another more appropriate text could always have been chosen. But, at least, the one proposed can be useful. There are many others like it.

Preliminary methodological caveats

This introductory work, although independent and complete in itself, has also been conceived in relation to a second work that, at a new level of depth, complements this initial look. It is the book *Hans Urs von Balthasar II. Aspectos centrales de su Trilogía,* Ediciones Encuentro, Madrid 2021, which exposes the main theological lines of the *Trilogy, in order* to know the main contributions of this great author in the different areas of theological science. However, each book is independent of the other and can also be considered as two autonomous works.

The 16 vols. of the *Theological Trilogy* will be cited in this work according to the following abbreviation: *Gloria, Theodramatica, Theologica, Epilogue,* followed by the volume and page. This work by Balthasar is published in Spanish by Ediciones Encuentro and the

German original by the publishing house founded by Balthasar himself, *Johannes Verlag (Einsiedeln)*

In principle, as bibliographical reference, I always indicate the Spanish edition of Balthasar's works, and when there is no translation, then I indicate the reference of the original German (usually adding the translation of the title into Spanish). And to quote Balthasar's texts, when there is a translation, I always use the translations already published in Spanish. This is especially true for the whole *Trilogy*. However, I have always revised the German original and whenever I have modified any translation to make it closer to the original, I have marked it with an asterisk (*) after the indication of the pages of the Spanish edition in the footnote. All other translations of Balthasar are my own. Biblical quotations, which are not within Balthasar's quotations, are taken from the Spanish Episcopal Conference's translation of the Holy Bible published by the BAC.

This book was made possible thanks to two international sabbatical semesters granted to me by the Pontifica Universidad Católica de Chile, held respectively at the Theologische Fakultät Paderborn (Germany, 2012) and at St. Benet's Hall, University of Oxford (UK, 2019), in addition to a B-scholarship from Stipendienwerk Lateinamerika-Deutschland e.V.

Special words of gratitude go to the St. John Community in Basel (Switzerland), without whose welcome and help - in many ways - this work would not have been possible. To Frau Cornelia Capol (q.e.p.d.), who welcomed me and financed my stays in the Balthasar Archive, receiving from her also invaluable testimonies about Hans Urs von Balthasar and Adrienne von Speyr. To Claudia Müller, who accompanied me and helped me throughout the elaboration of the text with her suggestions and help in the archive library. And to so many other people who make it possible for a work like this to be written, to all of whom I keep with indelible gratitude in my heart.

Prelude: a manuscript work

Incredible as it may seem today, the Balthasar Archive (which is still in the process of systematization and therefore not open to the public for the time being), at Alemannengasse 78 (Basel), contains three boxes (one for each part of the *Trilogy*) with the handwritten pages of the entire *Trilogy*. Indeed, Balthasar *handwrote* about 3,500 A4 pages, which became about 7,000 printed pages in the German edition. Some parts were in normal handwriting, others in shorthand. These pages were then typed up by his permanent and loyal secretary, Frau Cornelia Capol, and then proofread again by Balthasar, who made a few simple corrections. After that, in principle, the text was ready for publication.

In a review - even a superficial one - of all these pages, we would immediately be struck by the fact that Balthasar has written his work "off the cuff" and with very few corrections, and then, in the revision of the typed text, he does not make any major corrections either. This is unusual. The changes that are found refer to words, titles and some aspect of wording. Sometimes a crossed-out sentence is found, which is then repeated in a different way. And, rarely, an entire paragraph is found deleted, which is then repeated in a different way. This, on the one hand, is underlining the outstanding intellectual capacity of Balthasar - who has the ideas very clear in his mind before turning them to writing - and, on the other hand, explains the speed and capacity of work he possessed, which has allowed him to write that huge amount of texts and articles published during his life (about 100 books, more than 600 articles and contributions, numerous translations of books and anthologies, and about 200 forewords, epilogues and reviews, besides the almost 60 books of Adrienne von Speyr, which she dictated to him). In addition, Balthasar was writing this great work that we are studying, during 26 years, in which he dedicated a great part of his time to it, but without ever leaving other commitments or the simultaneous writing of other minor works,

according to the testimony of the members of the same Community of St. John who lived with him. For this purpose, he usually had two simultaneous workplaces in his home (Arnold-Böcklin-Strasse 42, Basel): a desk in his office and another in his library, where he wrote all his work and where, in addition, he could answer the countless correspondence he was constantly receiving. All this, which may seem rather anecdotal, is, however, a sign of the importance of the author we are studying, of the mental clarity he had when it came to explaining his thoughts and of how deeply all these ideas were deeply rooted in his heart and mind.

Hans Urs von Balthasar *Trilogy*

1. In Spanish

Gloria. A theological aesthetics. Vol. 1: *The perception of form,* Ediciones Encuentro, Madrid 1985.

Gloria. A theological aesthetics. Vol. 2: *Estilos eclesiásticos,* Ediciones Encuentro, Madrid 1986.

Gloria. A theological aesthetics. Vol. 3: *Lay styles,* Ediciones Encuentro, Madrid 1986.

Gloria. A theological aesthetics. Vol. 4: *Metaphysics. Edad Antigua,* Ediciones Encuentro, Madrid 1986.

Gloria. A theological aesthetics. Vol. 5: *Metaphysics. Edad Moderna,* Ediciones Encuentro, Madrid 1988.

Gloria. A Theological Aesthetics. Vol. 6: *Old Testament,* Ediciones Encuentro, Madrid 1988.

Gloria. A Theological Aesthetics. Vol. 7: *New Testament,* Ediciones Encuentro, Madrid 1988.

Theodramática. Vol. 1: *Prolegomena,* Ediciones Encuentro, Madrid 1990.

Theodramática. Vol. 2: *Las personas del drama: el hombre en Dios*, Ediciones Encuentro, Madrid 1992.

Theodramática. Vol. 3: *Las personas del drama: el hombre en Cristo,* Ediciones Encuentro, Madrid 1993.

Theodramática. Vol. 4: *The action,* Ediciones Encuentro, Madrid 1995.

Theodramática. Vol. 5: *The last act,* Ediciones Encuentro, Madrid 1997.

Theologica. Vol. 1: *Verdad del mundo,* Ediciones Encuentro, Madrid 1997.

Theologica. Vol. 2: *Verdad de Dios,* Ediciones Encuentro, Madrid 1997.

Theologica. Vol. 3: *The Spirit of Truth,* Ediciones Encuentro, Madrid 1998.

Epílogo, Ediciones Encuentro, Madrid 1998.

2. German original

Herrlichkeit. Eine theologische Ästhetik. Bd. I: *Schau der Gestalt,* Johannes Verlag Einsiedeln, Trier 31988.

Herrlichkeit. Eine theologische Ästhetik. Bd. II: *Fächer der Stile.* Teil 1: *Klerikale Stile,* Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 31984.

Herrlichkeit. Eine theologische Ästhetik. Bd. II: *Fächer der Stile.* Teil 2: *Laikale Stile,* Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 31984.

Herrlichkeit. Eine theologische Ästhetik. Bd. III/1: *Im Raum der Metaphysik*. Teil 1: *Altertum,* Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 21975.

Herrlichkeit. Eine theologische Ästhetik. Bd. III/1: *Im Raum der Metaphysik*. Teil 2: *Neuzeit,* Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 21975.

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Herrlichkeit. Eine theologische Ästhetik. Bd. III/2. Part 2: *Neuer Bund,* Johannes Verlag Einsiedeln, Trier 21988.

Theodramatik. Bd. I: *Prolegomena,* Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1973.

Theodramatik. Bd. II: *Die Personen des Spiels.* Part 1: *Der Mensch in Gott,* Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1976.

Theodramatik. Bd. II: *Die Personen des Spiels.* Part 2: *Die Personen in Christus,* Johannes Verlag Einsiedeln, Freiburg 21998.

Theodramatik. Bd. III: *Die Handlung,* Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1980.

Theodramatik. Bd. IV: *Das Endspiel,* Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1983.

Theologik. Bd. I: *Wahrheit der Welt,* Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1985.

Theologik. Bd. II: *Wahrheit Gottes,* Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1985.

Theologik. Bd. III: *Der Geist der Wahrheit,* Johannes Verlag Einsiedeln, Trier 1987.

Epilog, Johannes Verlag Einsiedeln, Trier 1987.

Part One

Introductory Aspects for Understanding Balthasar

I. Balthasar's intellectual biography

Biographical itinerary

The biography of each human being, his life trajectory, not only influences his own thought, but, at the same time, explains it. The same is true of Balthasar. His history, the encounters he had, the unexpected events he experienced, also the sufferings and difficulties he had to face, all this was, in some way, determining -as it could not be otherwise- the way of being and the theological contribution of Balthasar. For the same reason, his literary work - which for Balthasar is only an instrument at the service of the mission, which is the only central thing[6] - and, in particular, his theology, are better understood if we keep in mind the fundamental events of his life .[7]

Early years and youth. All the testimonies of those who knew him - and it is enough to see his literary production[8] - agree in affirming that Balthasar was a man gifted with extraordinary intellectual and artistic talents[9] , but less attuned to the exact and mathematical sciences[10] . Not a few were intimidated - sometimes also, somewhat unintentionally, humbled - by his manner, quickness and depth of mind, as even by his physical height. He was born in Lucerne, Switzerland (August 12, 1905), into a family with a long Catholic tradition, although there were also Protestants, like his maternal grandfather. According to his own words, he grew up with an "undisputed faith", "obvious, never troubled by doubt"[11] , a faith that was something natural and proper to life. The example of his mother, Gabrielle Pietzcker, whom as a child he accompanied to Mass, both during the week and on Sundays, was important. He had to suffer her death when he was only 14 years old. An important part of his early childhood was also spent with his maternal grandmother in a boarding house she ran in Felsberg, Switzerland, where from his earliest childhood he could speak German, French and English, with the cultural openness that this meant.

The first years of his studies already showed some of his fundamental characteristics, which would accompany him throughout his life. First of all, his fascination for music, "for which he possessed extraordinary qualities"[12] . As a child, he spent hours playing the piano. He appreciated the Romantics, but later Bach, and above all Mozart, "the unmovable pole star around which the other two (the major and minor bears [: Bach and Schubert]) revolved"[13] . Throughout his life he never gave up this hobby, despite the fact that when he entered the Society of Jesus, he tells us, "music automatically ended"[14] . He studied secondary education, first in Engelbert (Switzerland), with the Benedictines (four years), and then he was transferred by his parents to Feldkirch (Austria, on the border with Switzerland), where the Jesuits (two and a half years), perhaps - we do not know the reason - in search of a greater academic demand. In this period he already showed his second great inclination: literature. He could stand up at night, wherever he could find light, to read Goethe. And clearly his abilities were far greater than those of an ordinary student: a year and a half before finishing his studies, in 1924, without the knowledge of his parents, he went to Zurich (Switzerland) and successfully passed the final examination of his schooling, in order to be able to enter the university.

Time at university. In 1924 he began his studies of Germanistics (= German literature, history and philosophy, which includes Greek and Latin cultural roots and the Germanic heritage from late antiquity to the present). As was normal at that time, he was able to study in different German-speaking cities, always looking for subjects and professors that interested him. He was in Vienna - the longest stay -, Berlin - one semester - and Zurich. In Vienna, most of the time he lived in the house of Rudolf Allers, disciple and then adversary of Freud, "physician, philosopher, theologian"[15] , who "was an almost inextinguishable source of stimulation" that "communicated to him the look for human love as the objective means of human existence"[16] . In Berlin, he was able to follow some lessons of Romano Guardini on Kierkegaard and deepened his knowledge of Indo-European philology and the study of Sanskrit. There he became acquainted with Indian

philosophy, and was left forever with the desire to write a book on the possibilities of the "encounter with Asia"[17] . He obtained his doctorate - magna *cum laude* - in 1929, at the University of Zurich, with a thesis entitled *Geschichte des eschatologischen Problems in der modernen deutschen Literatur* (= *History of* the eschatological problem in modern German literature)[18] , which reviewed German literature and philosophy, from Romanticism to the present, in the perspective of its stance towards transcendence or ultimate realities (= τὰ ἔσχατα). He discovers two fundamental attitudes: the Promethean attitude (= Prometheus, who stole fire from the gods) and the Dionysian attitude (= Dionysus, inspirer of ritual ecstasy) which, in synthesis, respectively, would be: o to understand the totality of existence as a work based on the exclusive strength of the human being, who compares himself to God (*grosso modo*: Enlightenment, idealism); or to understand it as an unsuccessful attempt of the human being to overcome his own limitations, which make him fall into the meaninglessness of life (*grosso modo*: existentialism)[19] . Here we can note that, although his studies were not properly theological, the content of his thesis was theological in the deepest sense. This shows us what will be his own way -for the rest of his life- of understanding revelation and the manifestation of God in the world: literature, philosophy and theology, each one from its own methodology, perspective and density, are a word about transcendence and, therefore, an occasion of revelation[20] . For him, man's own transcendence justifies the *theological* character of every properly human work. In fact, in his years of study prior to his ordination to the priesthood, he reworked this work and published it, between 1937-1939, under the title *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele. Studien zu einer Lehre von letzten Haltungen* (= Apocalypse of the German Soul. Studies on a doctrine about ultimate positions) .[21]

Jesuit student. On November 1, 1929, he entered the novitiate of the Society of Jesus in the Upper German Province (Tisis, Austria), to which the Swiss region belonged at that time. Until the summer of 1927, when he made a thirty-day retreat near Basel (in Whylen), he had never before thought of becoming a priest. But there he perceived

with the utmost clarity the call of God. This experience of having been called, without previous merit and without having planned it at all, will leave him deeply marked from now on, particularly in his awareness that God is completely sovereign to do with one what he has planned in order to fulfill the mission entrusted to him. The human being is a mission, that is to say, he is in God's hands for whatever he wills. Only God is God and only he can do it; and the human being must obey him because he belongs to him and only in him does he find his fullness: "you are a pebble in an already existing mosaic"[22] .

His years of study were not easy. In the first place, he was almost ten years older than the rest of his Jesuit classmates; moreover, he had already finished his doctorate and his interests differed from those of his classmates, who had just finished their schooling. On the other hand, in spite of the good professors he met (Johann Baptist Schuster, Maximilian Rast, Henri Vignon and Henri Rondet), the philosophy and theology of those years was marked by that tedious neo-scholasticism which, from Leo XIII onwards, had been promoted in ecclesiastical studies in order to combat modernism. In this context, some of the professors with whom he lived - such as Erich Przywara and Henri de Lubac - were decisive. They knew how to understand him, offered him their permanent friendship and stimulated him in his intellectual quests "consoling this young man who was languishing in the desert of neo-scholasticism"[23] . After his two years of novitiate (1929-1931), he was sent to Pullach, near Munich (Germany), for his two years of philosophy (and not three, given his doctorate) (1931-1933); and then to Fourvière, near Lyon (France), for his theology studies, where he stayed for four years (1933-1937). At that time he lived with other companions, who would later also become well-known theologians, with whom "while the others played soccer"[24] , they read the Fathers of the Church (Henri Bouillard, Jean Daniélou, Donatien Mollat, Pierre Lyonnet, François Varillon). In fact, a fundamental characteristic of those years of study, thanks to the influence, first of Przywara, but then, above all, of Lubac, was his openness to the world of the Fathers of the Church, whom he read with great profit and which in some way

also marked his *forma mentis.* But not only did he read them, but, as a permanent and distinctive trait of his, he also wrote a book on each important author he discovered, or made a translation or an anthology. His studies and anthologies on Augustine, Irenaeus, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus the Confessor[25] date from this period. His stay in Lyon-Fourviere also brought him a second element destined to last: "love for the great French Catholic poets"[26] : Paul Claudel, Charles Péguy and Georges Bernanos. "They have been my indispensable companions forever." He translated Claudel's *The Satin Shoe* and wrote a voluminous text of more than 500 pages [27] "on the Christianity of Bernanos"[28] . This has been the determining point of his interest in French literature: to delve into the encounter between Christianity and culture in that effervescent French Catholic revival.

First years as a priest. On July 26, 1936, along with 21 other companions, he was ordained a priest in Munich by the Archbishop, Cardinal Michael Faulhaber, and presided at his first Mass in a private chapel in Lucerne. Years later, reflecting on his priesthood, he explained what he experienced during that time:

> There is a Providence that led me straight to the priesthood, and that in preparing me for priestly ordination, made me understand that the priesthood was exactly that way of being available, it was readiness to let myself be led in any way to the service of God and his Church. And so it occurred to me to boldly put these words from the Canon (understandable to few of the readers, and for a long time, scarcely transparent to myself in their consequences) in the memorial of my first Mass: *Benedixit, fregit, deditque* [*blessed it, broke it and gave it*] . [29]

Indeed, spoken in this way as a reminder of his priestly ordination, they are incomprehensible. But at the time, they were also incomprehensible to Balthasar in the true existential meaning they would take on in his life. On the day of his ordination as a Jesuit priest he could not have imagined the direction his ministry would take, and how God would, in the course of his life, truly bless him, but would also break him hard, and thus give him in service to others. What was clear to Balthasar from the beginning was that the Christian life - and particularly his priestly being - had to consist of a total dedication, whose concrete development could not be anticipated until the moment God had foreseen had arrived; which necessarily

means - at the same time - cross and fruitfulness.

He still had to finish his theological studies before he was assigned to Munich in 1937 as a collaborator (especially as a reviewer) of the journal *Stimmen der Zeit*. He remained there until 1939, where he was also able to prepare the publication of his former doctoral thesis and some of the books he had written during those years. That same year, 1939, he made his third probation - proper to his order - and the 30 days of spiritual exercises. When World War II broke out, he had to be transferred and was offered two possibilities: to become a professor at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, where he was to help found an institute of ecumenical theology; or to move to Basel (Switzerland) as a chaplain to university students. In Switzerland, Jesuits, in general, could not do explicit pastoral work because they had a "constitutional prohibition to exercise any work 'in the Church or in the school' as well as the foundation of new houses"[30] . For this reason, an important part of their activity had been centered on student chaplaincies, where the apostolate was above all cultural and focused on university youth. Balthasar chose Basel. Here we find a somewhat surprising fact: Balthasar was never a university professor. To tell the truth, he never wanted to be one, as he expressed it on several occasions. That choice marked his future pastoral life, but at the same time, it already showed much of his intellectual disposition: his theology was never a classroom theology - with the advantages and disadvantages that this can have - but was directly oriented to the cultural dialogue with the present. Thus, at the beginning of 1940, we find him settled in Basel, in the *Borromäum* community, where he remained until he left the company in 1950.

Student chaplain in Basel. These 10 years in Basel, on the one hand, were especially fruitful in his pastoral work and, on the other hand, triggered the events that ended with his painful departure from the order. Given the characteristics of pastoral work in Switzerland, Balthasar developed his work in three directions, which otherwise suited him very well. Firstly, his editorial work. Because of the wartime isolation of German-speaking Catholicism in Switzerland, his own publishing work was necessary. The humanist and Christian

cultural heritage was not to be allowed to be lost. In times of *inhuman* war it is necessary to emphasize and transmit what is truly *human.* Hence the publication of what came to be around 50 volumes of selected works by great European authors, with many translations from French .[31]

Secondly, and undoubtedly the main task, the most direct and with the most visible fruits, was his chaplaincy with the students, starting from diverse religious-cultural activities. He did this through four lines of work: countless conferences; series of spiritual exercises; personal conversations; and participation in study circles. With regard to the latter, in addition to his collaboration and participation in various existing student associations, he founded together with the young Robert Rast (1920-1946) the Educational Community of University Students (*Studentische Schulungsgemeinschaft*) and later the Academic Work Community (*Akademische Arbeitgemeinschaft*), which had a long existence until a few years ago. To these study circles he invited well-known intellectuals of the time: Hugo Rahner, Gustav Siewerth, Max Müller, Gottlieb Söhngen, Martin Buber, Otto Karre, etc. Some of the books written in this period were especially intended for these students. Thus, for example, *The Grain of Wheat. Aphorisms*[32] *, The Heart of the World*[33] and *Theology of History*[34] , develop a theology of history from the incarnation. For Balthasar "the God encountered in the flesh is also the man chosen from eternity, in whom everything in heaven and on earth is recapitulated, who redeems the world and raises his brothers to become children of the Father [... and] that action of God with the world [...] always remains history, action, drama and event and has its center in the fullness of time, in the incarnation". It is a question here of "the integration of the form of time as such in the process of revelation: Christ [...] becomes the criterion for redeemed time and for the whole of history"[35] . It is a theology for the Christian in the midst of temporal realities. As was to be expected, this intense living together, reflection and spiritual accompaniment contributed to the awakening of some Jesuit vocations; but it also brought to maturity in Balthasar and in several young men and women the idea of secular consecration, years before

Pope Pius XII gave secular institutes a juridical status[36] . Regarding the book *The Layman and the State of Evangelical Counsels*[37] , he expressed that "[secular institutes] constitute the link between the lay state and the vowed consecrated life and show not only the existential unity of the Church but also its permanent and more actualized mission in the world"[38] . From these years is his famous article *Theology and Holiness*[39] , where he reflects on a subject that he admires: "There is surely no event in the history of Catholic theology less studied and yet deserving of greater attention than the fact that, starting from the great scholasticism, there have been very few saintly theologians"[40] . There he will refer to kneeling theology: "Theology was a praying, kneeling theology: that is why its benefits for prayer were so immense [...] There was a time when it passed from kneeling theology to seated theology"[41] .

And, thirdly, since Basel was a city with a prominent Protestant majority, another of his concerns was dialogue with that theology, if not also the intention of obtaining some conversions. In this context, the encounter with Karl Barth was especially relevant. During his years of studies, he had read some of his most important works: the *Commentary on the Letter to the Romans* and Volume I of *Ecclesial Dogmatics* and had been "fascinated" by their "systematic unity and consistency, and in fact it seemed to him that it was, in general, the first fully developed Protestant systematics"[42] ; and now they lived in the same city! Barth (1886-1968), a native of Basel, was a Reformed pastor and, from 1935, a professor at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Basel. Balthasar was almost 20 years his junior and yet they became good friends - and had a common taste for Mozart - with Barth influencing Balthasar rather than the other way around[43] . Although they never lost contact or mutual appreciation, in later years they drifted apart somewhat[44] . When Balthasar arrived in Basel, he attended some of the seminars offered by Barth and wrote a wonderful synthesis of his thought: *Karl Barth. Presentation and interpretation of his theology*[45] . This author, with his Christological centrality, represented an important influence on Balthasar's theology.

Meeting with Adrienne von Speyr and leaving the Order. In the midst of

this work, the meeting and subsequent conversion of Adrienne von Speyr took place and, somewhat later, the foundation of the Community of St. John. About the importance of A. von Speyr in Balthasar's life we will speak in the chapter specifically dedicated to it[46] . A very intelligent woman with an attractive personality, a doctor and with a great social capacity, she approached Balthasar because of her religious concerns. From a Protestant family and education, dissatisfied with her previous experience, she ended up being baptized -sub *conditione*- by Balthasar, on November 15, 1940. With mystical experiences since childhood, she made them known to Balthasar, who became her confessor until his death in 1967. Given her professional training, she began to help him in his work with students, and in 1945 they decided to found the women's branch of the Community of St. John (*Johannesgemeinschaft*), a secular institute that even anticipated ecclesiastical canonical legislation. In 1947 she founded the *Johannes* Publishing House in Einsiedeln (Switzerland), in order to be able to publish the works with the writings of Adrienne von Speyr, given the difficulties that such an experience at that time caused. All this caused increasing difficulties for Balthasar, either because of their closeness, or because his mystical experience was not easily accepted, or because a Jesuit cannot found and take charge of a work independently of the order. Thus, in 1946, on the occasion of his solemn profession, Balthasar was faced with a decision: he could neither continue to be responsible for the Community of St. John nor take responsibility for the mystical experience of Adrienne von Speyr. However, Balthasar asked that the veracity and orthodoxy of Adrienne's writings be examined as a criterion for defining the steps to be taken. But after four years of painful negotiations, the Society of Jesus did not accede to this request and Balthasar decided to leave the order for an act of greater obedience to God[47] . In effect, this is a culminating moment in his life, where he was faced with obeying a call that he clearly felt from God, but which his ecclesiastical superiors did not perceive as such. His long, serious, honest and profound discernment can be summarized in this solid text, both theologically and spiritually:

> One cannot object [to my decision, stating] that the correct solution of the conflict is fundamentally and in any case in obedience to the Order. It is fundamentally and in every

case in obedience to God. The superior, who must never be confused with God, is the ordinary way of the manifestation of the divine will, it is not the exclusive way. God remains free to make use of the human person as he wishes; and especially for someone who wanted to make himself entirely available in the form of life of the evangelical counsels. Religious life is not to enter a safe haven, but to stand and remain in the "Go forth from your homeland" (Gen 12:1) and in the "forsaking of all" [...] because obedience does not free us from our ultimate responsibility before God .[48]

The transcendental importance that this act had for his life is evident. But, in the first place, it shows the strong experience of God that Balthasar had. In a way this was a new manifestation of his vocation, at the foot of a tree, in Whylen, where he felt "like a flash of lightning [...:] you have nothing to choose, you have been chosen; you need nothing, you are needed [...] I had only to 'leave everything and follow', without intentions, desires, expectations; simply to remain still, waiting to see what I would be used for"[49] . On the other hand, despite the difficulties he had to face, he was henceforth able to devote himself wholeheartedly to the mission entrusted to him with regard to A. von Speyr[50] , to the community he had founded and to the fruitful literary work that was to come. But none of this was easy.

Years of silent maturation. From the time he left the Society of Jesus until the dawn of the Second Vatican Council, Balthasar undertook two fundamental works: he consolidated - together with Adrienne von Speyr - the Community of St. John and wrote - under her dictation - the work of Adrienne herself; and in a latent way, he began to prepare his future *Trilogy*. But, first of all, it must be said that the first five years after his departure were tremendously hard. In those years, a priest leaving the Order was certainly looked upon with suspicion. To this must be added the gossip - tremendously unfair and false - regarding his relationship with Adrienne von Speyr. And of course, the economic problem of survival. All this forced him to multiply his conferences, spiritual exercises and trips. However, he did not want to accept the offers he received to assume a university professorship (Munich and possibly Tübingen), because that would have taken away his freedom for the work he was carrying out. On the other hand, the bishop of Basel, Franziskus von Streng, preferred that he move to another place and, for five years, no bishop wanted to incardinate him

in his diocese. Balthasar faced all these difficulties with fortitude, sacrifice and convinced of the path he had chosen. He had said in a letter to his friends on the occasion of his departure: "whether in the worldly sphere the advantages or disadvantages of this decision will follow now or later, was neither discussed nor taken into consideration"[51] . That same year, 1950, she wanted to renew her vows - made at the end of her novitiate - before the abbot of the Benedictine monastery of Maria Laach (Germany), because the decisions taken were in no way intended to break her fundamental commitment to God: exactly the opposite. It was not until February 2, 1956, that he was finally accepted for incardination in the diocese of Chur (Switzerland), where he was able to remain a diocesan priest until the end of his life. This was an important moment, not only because it relieved him financially but, above all, because it gave him an ecclesiastical support for his life and mission. From then on he was able to return to live in Basel, in the house of Adrienne von Speyr and her husband, Werner Kaegi, where they provided him with a room.

In the midst of this intense life he continued with the writing of Adrienne's dictations and was also able to publish an important number of his own books, which show that he was already reaching an important intellectual maturity. Some examples. *Tearing Down the Bastions*[52] , "a small programmatic book"[53] , which was "the last and impatient goring for a Church entrenched against the world"[54] . A commentary on the treatise "on the charisms" and that of "the states of life" of St. Thomas, because "it is legitimate and necessary to examine the interpretation of its richness in the endless variety of 'charisms', 'missions' or special 'spiritualities'"[55] . A text, at the request of the St. John Community, for their spiritual growth, and perhaps the most profound book of his entire production: *Contemplative Prayer*[56] , which deals not with contemplation "in the mere Greek sense of the word, but decidedly in the biblical sense of the openness of every human person to the ever greater meaning of the word of God"[57] ; that is, it is about "that primordial act" which is "listening to the word"[58] . In the same vein - but closer to the exegetical commentaries - *The Letters to the Thessalonians and the Pastoral Letters open to contemplative prayer*[59] ;

and the stupendous examples of a contemplative life lived in this way, described in the life of St. Thérèse of Lisieux[60] and Elizabeth of Dijon[61] . At the end of the decade - already moving towards a more integrated view of his writings - he published the first two compilations of his theological essays: *Verbum caro. Theological Essays I*[62] , on Christology, "where human existence in all its forms is understood as the essential language of the Logos [... and where] he shows the inescapability of human thought and philosophizing as the presupposition for the speaking of God ('revelation') and its understanding ('theology')"[63] ; and *Sponsa Verbi. Theological Essays II*[64] , on ecclesiology, which explicitly asks: "'Who is the Church?' She, in her deepest reality, is the unity of those who, gathered and formed by the immaculate and therefore unlimited assent of Mary, who through the grace that has the form of Christ, are prepared to let God's saving will take place in themselves and for all their brothers"[65] . Let us also mention his translation of Calderón de la Barca's play, *El gran teatro del mundo*[66] , which, as a title, will inspire the context and structure of all his *Theo-dramatics*. In these works Balthasar's theological interests and pastoral concerns are clearly perceived.

These are the years in which he began to conceive the idea of making a *Trilogy* that could synthesize his thinking. He had written a lot about what others thought. It was time to say what he thought. Together with his intellectual, human and spiritual maturation, two providential events prepared this great work. On the one hand, the intensity of the previous years broke his health and, at the end of 1957, caused him a strong state of exhaustion. In 1958 he suffered from phlebitis and leukemia, which paralyzed his limbs and brought him close to death. Then, during those long months of convalescence, he was able to concretize his idea and thus gestate an outline of his *Trilogy*. On the other hand, although between 1959 and 1960, on the occasion of the convocation of the Council, Balthasar was invited by the Johann Adam Möhler *Institute* for Ecumenism in Paderborn (Germany) (*Johann Adam Möhler Institut* für Ökumenik) to work on a proposal on ideas for the future Council in an ecumenical perspective; When the time came to invite the experts of the preparatory

commissions, Balthasar was not summoned by Rome (as were, for example, Henri de Lubac and Yves Congar), nor did any bishop intervene on his behalf in Rome (as did Cardinal Julius Döpfner, Archbishop of Munich, for Karl Rahner, for example), nor was he asked by any bishop as a consulting theologian to attend the Council (as Joseph Ratzinger was invited by the Archbishop of Cologne, Cardinal Joseph Frings). Seen from today, it seems unbelievable. But at the time, his departure from the company was a precedent that still weighed on many bishops. It is also true that teamwork, "discussions about words", "compromise formulas" and "collective redactions" were not Balthasar's own thing[67] . Be that as it may, his non-direct participation in the Council left him full freedom to write in those years the seven volumes of *Gloria. A Theological Aesthetic*, published between 1961 and 1969. His non-convocation to the council, more than a lost opportunity, was a providential opportunity .[68]

Moment of manifest fruits. Here begins the moment of his main visible fruits, when he becomes known throughout the world. First of all, he devoted himself with great effort to the writing of the subsequent parts of his magnum opus, which kept him busy until a year before his death: *Theodramatica (*1973-1983), *Theologica* (1985-1987), *Epilogue* (1987)[69] . The publication of *Gloria. A Theological Aesthetic* made Balthasar famous, due to the theme chosen, the erudition shown and the novelty of his approach. For this reason, when Pope Paul VI, in 1969, founded the International Theological Commission, he appointed him a member of it and remained a member until his death. In this context, a new initiative arose for him. In 1972, together with other members of the International Theological Commission, in view of the post-conciliar development, they decided to found the *International Catholic Review Communio*, "with an explicit reference to Vatican II", with the aim of "rethinking Christian identity by centering it in the heart of communion with Christ", in "the determined and confident will to establish a dialogue, encounter and concrete interaction between human conscience and believing conscience, between culture and theology, between Church and society"[70] . But when the time came to realize the initiative, it was Balthasar who had

to take on the work, and the German edition was the first to appear. Gradually, editions in several other languages (today more than 15) and countries (e.g. Italy, France, USA, Argentina) appeared and remain in force to this day. The magazine was an attempt to contribute to the proper reception of the Council. The original initiative was Balthasar's, but since then, each editorial committee has conducted the journal according to its own editorial criteria (which may not necessarily always represent the ideas of the founding group). On the other hand, in all those years Balthasar was a theologian who was well known and admired, but also discussed. Although the common reader often formed an opinion about him based on just a few phrases or ideas, expressed in some text, but without understanding the globality of his theology, in which these ideas must be inserted and from which they must be interpreted. Balthasar is an author who does not allow himself to be trapped by a couple of misunderstood or manipulated theses out of context.

On September 17, 1967, after years of suffering and a long illness, Adrienne von Speyr died in one night at her home at Münsterplatz 4, Basel. This meant for Balthasar a new stage in his mission: to make Adrienne's life known and to achieve the publication of her entire literary work, as an expression of their common mission. This is the origin of these two indispensable works to get to know their joint work: *Our Task. Recuento y plan*[71] and *Una primera mirada a Adrienne von Speyr*[72] . It was also a way of making known her life and the mission to which God called her in the church.

During these years of theological maturity, he also dedicated long hours to the attention of students, doctoral students and priests who came to him for advice, help or simply wanted to meet him personally. He took time to have good conversations or, by letter, to answer their questions. In 1968 he bought a vacation house in the pre-Alpine mountains, facing Lake Lucerne, in Rigi-Kaltbad; a beautiful and peaceful place, where he spent one or two months in the summer and other weeks during the year, to recover from the accumulated fatigue, but, above all, to make better progress in the writing of his books. There he would invite students and priests for a few days of

study . Those who had that opportunity, to this day remember it with gratitude and affection. In this context and as a fruit of his long years of work with young people, in 1983, he was able to found the priestly branch of the St. John Community .[73]

Along with the writing of the *Trilogy*, during these last years, he also wrote other important works. Some of them presented or synthesized central aspects of his thought: *Theology of the Three Days. The Paschal Mystery*[74] , which presents his theology of Good Friday and Holy Saturday - with Jesus' descent into hell - based on the writings of Adrienne von Speyr; *Das Ganze im Fragment. Aspekte der Geschichtstheologie* (= The whole in the fragment. Aspects *of* the theology of history)[75] , a more finished version of his theology of history starting from the incarnation; *The anti-Roman complex. Integration of the Papacy in the Universal Church*[76] , which is an ecclesiological synthesis, which he would later develop more extensively in *Theodramatics III,* where "the aim was to demonstrate in general terms the organic unity of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, to investigate the different aspects and stratifications of this unity, and only then to integrate the Petrine factor of unity with the other broader factors"[77] ; and *States of Life of the Christian*[78] , which summarizes the theme of the diverse and complementary vocations in the Church.

There were also occasional writings, somewhat polemical, but which expressed his love for the truth and what is proper to Christianity. They can be understood within the post-conciliar polarization, but also from the passion to maintain the specificity of Christianity against everything that dilutes the testimony of faith. Openness" to the world can never mean "accommodation" to the world. The Gospel also has an ineliminable element of rupture. We have here: *Who is a Christian?* [79] *; Seriousness with things. Cordula or the authentic case*[80] *; Klarstellungen. Zur Prüfung der Geister* (= *Clarifications. To discern the spirits*)[81] *; Catholic. Aspects of the Mystery*[82] *; Neue Klarstellungen* (= *New Clarifications*)[83] *; Kleine Fibel für verunsicherte Laien* (= *Little Alphabet for Insecure Laity*)[84] . The titles speak for themselves. For Balthasar "the demands are uncompromising"[85] . The Christian must

be prepared for all kinds of failures and scorn. It was the way of Christ and will always be the way of the Church. But these ideas were not always understood within his more global thinking - much less in the tremendously optimistic post-conciliar environment - and so he was often considered a pessimist or reactionary. But this does not do justice to an author who is much more balanced and profound when read in its entirety and properly understood.

Finally, two other themes preoccupied his attention. On the one hand, he wants to show how theological plurality is born and, therefore, must find its unity in Christ, since the incarnate Word is a *unity* that descends from on high, that surpasses all that is expected and brings to a higher and new level all that was previously experienced. It is a totality that is not a sum, but a unity. This is what he expressed, first, in *Einfaltungen. Auf Wegen christlicher Einigung* (= *Convergences. Paths to Christian Unity*)[86] ; then more broadly in *Truth is Symphonic. Aspects of Christian Pluralism*[87] ; and, finally, in *Theodramatics* III. And the other theme was one that aroused more than a few polemics: the irreducible hope that Christ's redemption was not in vain for any human being. He spoke on this theme many times, from his early years of study, and later developed it also from the theology of Adrienne von Speyr. It is a theme that was very much at the center of his thinking. At the end of his life he wrote *What Should We Hope?*[88] and *A Little Discourse on Hell*[89] , in which he does not postulate a universal salvation, as is often said, but a hope without limits. No one can answer with certainty the question of whether all will be saved, but we all have a duty to hope that they will be .[90]

Waiting for the encounter with the Father. The final years of his life were filled with tributes (e.g. Mozart Prize in Innsbruck, 1987), *honorary* doctorates (e.g. Catholic University of Washington, 1980) and ecclesial recognitions (e.g. Paul VI International Award, 1984; and his creation as cardinal, 1988), in addition to those he had already received previously (e.g. *honorary* doctorates in Edinburgh and Münster, Golden Cross of the Holy Mount Athos, in the 1960s). They were also the occasion of many, many visits, invitations, correspondence, advice for doctoral work, theological consultations,

friendship and camaraderie, etc. Balthasar always made time for all of them, even though all this was exhausting work. He complained that the number of letters to be answered, despite all his efforts, never decreased. In addition, his circle of friends had widened enormously: among the many who approached him, the grouping around the *Communio Review* was especially close to him. He also had contacts with the Communion and Liberation movement and its founder, Father Luigi Giussani.

In 1988, Pope John Paul II named him a cardinal. A sign that seeks to exalt and recognize his contribution to the Church. For Balthasar this is something uncomfortable, it does not coincide with his character, but he accepts it as an ecclesial gesture[91] . However, two days before receiving the cardinal's capelet in Rome, in the morning, in his house at Arnold Böcklin Str. 42, in Basel, while he was preparing for the daily celebration of Mass, together with the ladies of the Community of St. John who lived with him, he suddenly died at the age of 83, leaving behind him a work destined to bear much fruit in the future. He was buried in a family tomb in his hometown, Lucerne, after a well-attended funeral presided over by the then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger. On that occasion, the future Benedict XVI affirmed: "what the Pope wanted to express with this gesture of recognition [the appointment of Cardinal], of respect, is still valid: no longer in a particular and private way, because the Church tells us officially and publicly that Balthasar was a teacher of faith, a guide to access the sources of living water, a witness of the word, through whom we learn to discover Christ, through whom we can learn to love life"[92] .

Relevant influences

In reviewing Balthasar's biography, we have noticed that, throughout his life, he entered into dialogue with many authors, either personally or through their literary works, who in different ways influenced his way of thinking and, later, his works. This is normal in every thinker, but in the case of Balthasar it happens in a special way, since his programmatic purpose is precisely to recover the truth scattered

throughout the world (= seeds of the Word), throughout history and the Christian tradition, and to bring it back to its original source and highest point of unity: Christ, the Logos of God made flesh. We have already hinted at some of the elements that he took on in the course of his life from these valuable encounters. However, it is good to review now, in a little more detail, the influences that Balthasar himself considers most important, as a hermeneutical criterion for an adequate interpretation of his thought. And we will do so -as seems logical- starting from his own autobiographical writings .[93]

First of all, let us ponder the fact that it is he himself who warns us that his "own work is what it is, only in relation to other works"[94] , among which the work of Erich Przywara and Adrienne von Speyr stand out. What lies behind this statement is the conviction that his literary work is simply at the service of his ecclesial vocation and "fundamental intention: to demonstrate that Christianity is the ultimate unsurpassable, *id quod quod majus cogitari nequit* [= that beyond which nothing greater can be thought], because it is the human Word of God for the world, the most humble service of God, which greatly perfects every human aspiration"[95] . This is why he dedicated his life to "clinging to the richness of the ecclesiastical tradition" because "only the best has a chance of survival"[96] in the face of a "present that advances without stopping"[97] .

Throughout his life, on several occasions, he recalled his great inspirers and sources of thought. From his time studying German philology (or Germanistics) in Vienna, Berlin and Zurich, he said in 1945, "Plato, Hölderlin, and above all Goethe and Hegel"[98] were important. And when he had finished his work, in 1984, he affirmed: "the fundamental postulate of my work *Gloria* was the ability to see a *Gestalt* (form) in its coherent totality: the Goethean gaze was to be applied to the phenomenon of Jesus and the convergence of the New Testament theologies"[99] . In 1965 he recalled with gratitude "the chaste Virgil and the God-filled heart of Plotinus"[100] , with whom he was "fascinated"[101] , without forgetting the "marvelous" Homer[102] . Thus, a first source for understanding his thought is, by his own testimony, the classical authors -poets and philosophers- and

Germanic literature and philosophy from Romanticism onwards. In some sense, Balthasar is authentically a "Romantic", and it is necessary to keep in mind this aspect of his formation and sensibility in order to understand many of his accents, his creativity, his freedom and his openness to art and *feeling* in order to discover and express the revelation of God. In that sense, the taste for music also played a role, especially Bach, Mozart and Haydn[103] . And likewise Rudolf Allers, with whom he understood that in the "turning from the *I* to the reality of the full *you* resided [...] the philosophical truth and the psychotherapeutic method"[104] , which will allow him to understand the ontological force that human love possesses and thus claim for every object an "ontic love"[105] .

When, already in the Society of Jesus, he began his philosophical-theological studies, he met Erich Przywara in Munich, "an unforgettable guide along the way [...], a combination of depth and fullness, ordering clarity and all-encompassing breadth"[106] . In addition to befriending him, Przywara showed him St. Thomas in the totality of his work, but obliged him to deal "also (as he did) with the whole of modern thought, to confront Augustine and Thomas with Hegel, with Scheler and with Heidegger"[107] . Aquinas is an indispensable source for understanding Balthasar, of whom as early as 1945 he wanted to "present a global interpretation"[108] . In his understanding of Thomas he is also indebted, among others, to Gustav Siewerth, a man "fierce in his philosophical rage against the oblivion of being, to then speak radiantly and sweetly of the mysterious heart of reality: the God of love, of the heart as the center of the human being, of the pain of existence, of the cross of the Son of the Father"[109] . Of particular relevance was his work *Das Schicksal der Metaphysik. Von Thomas zu Heidegger* (= *The Fate of Metaphysics. From Thomas to Heidegger*)[110] . He states that without G. Siewerth, the two vols. of *Gloria* IV and V*: In the Space of Metaphysics (Antiquity and Modern Times)* "would not have achieved their form"[111] . After Siewerth's death in 1963, Ferdinand Ulrich, with whom he also had a long friendship, was also important. His habilitation work (1959) - Homo *Abyssus: Das Wagnis der Seinsfrage* (= *Man, an unfathomable mystery. The adventure*

of the question of being)[112] - and the permanent meetings and study days together allowed him to deepen his metaphysical understanding of being. At the end of his life, in 1984, he acknowledged: "To the vision of this [Ferdinand Ulrich] I owe so much gratitude for the elaboration of the final part of *Gloria* IV, even up to the *Theodramática*. Both, especially the latter, have opened my eyes to the totality of the intellectual history of the West and to the theological-Christian conditions of the most recent history of philosophy"[113] .

During his stay in Lyon-Fourviere, his passion for the great French poets - Paul Claudel, Charles Péguy, Georges Bernanos, François Mauriac, among others - discovered there and developed with fruition, which would last until the end of his life, allowed him to understand more deeply some theological themes, but deeply integrated into an anthropology that is allowed and able to unfold with all its strength. The themes of "sin and forgiveness, confession and judgment" in Bernanos, and Claudel's reflections on "the nature of poetic knowledge and the need for *sympathia* -conaturalness- between the one who knows and the object known"[114] , are themes that will accompany Balthasar's reflection in the years that follow. The very long work of translation of Claudel's *The Satin Shoe* (between 1939 and 1965, in five versions)[115] , shows the importance he gave to a type of literature that knew how to express in an admirable way the richness and complexities of the human being, who is full of potentialities that fight among themselves, living in a world that makes God transparent in every reality and event, which mysteriously -and incomprehensibly- leads human life; as is manifestly expressed in that stupendous play. There is no doubt that such a perspective can very well be interpreted from the transcendentals of being, as Balthasar will do later in his *Trilogy*.

But it will be the meeting and friendship with Henri de Lubac - friendship and mutual admiration that will be lasting- what in those years in Lyon will decide the direction of his studies. He read Augustine well -according to Przywara's suggestion-, but de Lubac's teacher suggested to him especially the Alexandrians. And from there "a wide panorama was opened to him"[116] : Irenaeus, Clement, Gregory

of Nyssa and Maximus the Confessor. All in all, he will affirm: "Origen (for me, as once for Erasmus, more important than Augustine) became the key to all Greek patristics, of the High Middle Ages, even up to Hegel and Karl Barth"[117] . He will say: "nowhere do I find myself so well as with him"[118] , "the highest spirit of the first centuries"[119] . The study of the Fathers of the Church gave him, in the first place, a more adequate understanding of many of the themes that he would develop over time: Irenaeus gave him the idea of creation as God's work of art[120] and the importance of the *flesh* as the center and instrument of salvation; in Origen "[he] discovered that genius for the Catholic, which [he] wanted to emulate"[121] ; and from Maximus the Confessor he received his "conclusive synthesis of the patristic world of the spirit"[122] , to name but a few examples. But these authors, with their profound and adequate way of understanding the unity and distinction between theology and philosophy, will also have a determining influence on his way of understanding how philosophy meets revelation and how both mutually illuminate each other: revelation answers the fundamental questions of philosophy and philosophy illuminates revelation, making it comprehensible and acceptable to human beings. Starting from the principle that "without philosophy, there is no theology"[123] , the theologian must always begin "immersed - precisely in the light of revelation - in the mysterious structures of created being"[124] , marveling at how complex they are, which will make him ask himself: "in what way is the finite being 'image and likeness' of absolute being?"[125] . Thus, for Balthasar, the possibility of a supernatural revelation cannot be methodologically excluded, but the task is "integration," that is, "a rigorous collaboration between philosophy and theology"[126] , which requires that "both disciplines [be] intrinsically open to each other. [And] this is only possible when the analogy between the divine archetype and the worldly transcript is attempted to be rethought on both sides as central"[127] .

The Jesuit religious vocation, as an experience of having been unexpectedly taken by "the good hand of God" and having been "chosen for a true life"[128] , when he was "ever more disillusioned and with an ever emptier stomach"[129] , was another foundational

experience for his future. Those month-long spiritual exercises for lay students, held in Whylen in 1927, were decisive: "But it was neither theology nor priesthood that entered my eyes, but simply this: you have nothing to choose, you have been chosen; you need nothing, you are needed; you have no plans to make, you are a pebble in an already existing mosaic"[130] . Hence he affirms, in 1955, that "in the spiritual space between John and Ignatius everything that is decisive for me develops". "The Christian who is maturing, who must choose his life, is led by Ignatius to a personal encounter with Christ: in a contemplation of a concrete evangelical situation [...], which is determined by the *'call'* (as a framework concept of the life of Jesus) and *'choice'* (as the central act of the encounter). Christ chooses us and calls us; that we choose him is only obedience as a response"[131] . The *Exercises*, "the lofty school of Christian contemplation, of listening to the simple and personal word contained in the Gospel, of the choice of life for the attempt to follow"[132] , are a truly decisive element in Balthasar's theology. For him, Christian existence is "in its original source: listening to the word that calls and liberation for the expected response"[133] . This will be clearly reflected, above all, in his *Theodramatics,* where he presents human life as vocation-mission and "dramatic" relationship between the infinite freedom of God and the finite freedom of the human being. His theology, in good part, is a deep reflection and fruit of the *Exercises*. It is not at all misguided to think that -perhaps- Balthasar has been the theologian who has been best able to bring to a theological synthesis -or to a kind of system- the spirituality and charism of Ignatius, as Bonaventure to Francis and Thomas to St. Dominic. At least, for Balthasar, it was clear that all his theology revolved around a single center: everything is born of a call that has been made to us, and that we have not chosen, so that our life is transformed into a service and mission in the Church and the world .[134]

Linked to the above, insofar as all that was said "demanded a broad *theology of the* Word"[135] , is the importance of the meeting and friendship that, for 10 years, he had with Karl Barth in Basel. He states, remarkably, that "it is almost useless to emphasize how much I

owe Karl Barth: as I have already said, the vision of an integral biblical theology, but also the call for a dogmatically serious ecumenical dialogue". His famous book *Only love is worthy of faith* "represents the maximum closeness of the Catholic side to his position"[136] . The influence of Barth is perceived, in successive moments of the *Trilogy,* in two very important points for Balthasar: the centrality of the *word* that calls and that determines the whole life of the Christian; and the *Crucified One,* as revelation of the immeasurable and invisible love of the Father. But also in all his theology of history. In fact, "Christocentric thought finds its theoretical formulation in *Karl Barth* (*The Theology of Karl Barth*) and especially in *Theology of History*[137] , elaborated later"[138] as a direct result of that book.

And, as is well known, Adrienne von Speyr (1902-1967) occupies a very special place. Balthasar is very explicit and aware of this: "In Basel the mission of Adrienne von Speyr was decisive [... She] was the one who pointed out the corresponding path from Ignatius to John, and thus laid the foundation for most of the things that have been published by me, from 1940 onwards. Her work and mine are neither psychologically nor philologically dissociable, they are two halves of a whole, which has as its center a single foundation"[139] . This is to be understood, as Balthasar himself states, in the sense that "most of what I have written is a translation of what is formulated in a more immediate, less 'technical' way in Adrienne von Speyr's enormous work"[140] . What Balthasar has done is to try to "take up her [Adrienne's] theology and situate it in the more or less already known space of the theology of the Fathers, the Middle Ages and modern times." It is "to place at her disposal a very broad horizon that would not reduce and falsify the novelty and validity of her affirmations, but would offer her a sufficient space in which to express herself". Basically, it was a matter of putting in writing in a theological context, in contact with the whole tradition and with the best of Christianity, the intuitions of this contemplative and mystical woman, since "the Holy Spirit can suddenly illuminate parts of revelation that were openly available, but which had never been truly reflected upon"[141] . To the extent that Adrienne von Speyr's voluminous work, now fully

published, becomes known, the truth of this influence can be verified[142] . There is a fundamental concordance between the works of both[143] , although from two different approaches: one contemplative-intuitive and the other theological. This is not to say that the two aspects can be clearly distinguished. In synthesis, the life and work of Adrienne von Speyr has marked in a particularly important way the course of von Balthasar's theological reflection, providing him with some of the basic intuitions that are the cornerstones of his *Theological Trilogy*, such as, for example, the reflections on the intra-Trinitarian life or those on the descent of Jesus into hell .[144]

This account of the various influences that are discovered in our author has not intended to be, by any means, exhaustive, but simply wanted to show that his work will be well understood only if one keeps in mind the multitude of sources that make his work an integrative synthesis of very varied references. This is precisely where his richness and great originality lie: in his very personal and, at the same time, faithful reading of the authors. But this also responds to a deep programmatic conviction. Along with wanting to expose the best of the Christian tradition and the unsurpassable of Christianity, there is the persuasion that "he who sees more truth, is more profoundly right"[145] . It is the "method of increasing integration"[146] , but which has to be complemented with the acceptance of the revelation of "Christ, the *universale concretum*", as the "universal Logos"[147] . "If Christ is the concrete first idea of God the Creator [...] and, therefore, the final goal of the world, then it must be permitted to interrogate to the bottom the proposition: "once (and for all!) the *BEING* was in 'existence'""[148] . This is "the discredited 'and Catholic' [..., which] is not, in truth, a lukewarm compromise or syncretism, but the force of union - once again 'dramatic' - of that which to the human being appears as desperately fragmentary. Jesus Christ is, in this, the Catholic: God and man, descended to hell, ascended to heaven, he himself explores all the personal and social dimensions of the human being and founds them anew from his own experience"[149] . Creation and the human being, as its center, possess a profound inner unity that the incarnate Son reveals to us. Integration "is the resolute art of

always looking at the whole through all the fragments of the truth analyzed and lived, a whole that is always greater than us and our expressive capacity, but which, precisely insofar as it is greater, animates our whole Christian life"[150] . This is the guiding principle of his great literary work: to exhibit the integrating capacity of the Logos made flesh.

Structure of your thinking

Along with his biographical data and the authors who most contributed to and influenced him, in order to understand Balthasar's theology it is important to keep in mind the global structure of his thought, that is, the basic axis from which he builds his project and from which the totality of his work can be understood. This is something that Balthasar himself made explicit little by little. First, in the four retrospective looks at his books, which he made every 10 years (1945, 1955, 1965, 1975), in order to explain the meaning of his publications[151] ; then, in the preparation of the outline of his *Trilogy* and in various parts of the same[152] ; and finally, on May 10, 1988, a little more than a month before his death, in Madrid, on the occasion of the opening of a symposium on his own theology, he tried, for the last time, to summarize his thought[153] , "*in a nutshell*, as the English say (in a nutshell), insofar as this can be done without too much betrayal"[154] . There he gives us "the heart of his thought, for such a heart is supposed to exist" . [155]

This last text is elaborated precisely as an "outline of the trilogy: Aesthetics, Dramatics, Logic"[156] . But also the *Epilogue* to *the Trilogy,* written in 1987, explicitly attempts an elucidation of the structure of his thought reflected in the Trilogy. Indeed, the *Prologue* of that work tells us:

> I offer [the reader] something like a perspective that encompasses the whole work [= the *Trilogy*]. But do not expect in any way an American *digest*, a brief summary, but above all a justification of why the traditional theological treatises or *loci* have been presented here in a completely different way from what is customary, that is, from the transcendentals, in which the passage from true (and therefore religious) philosophy to the biblical theology of revelation is given in the easiest possible way . [157]

From these two texts we can synthetically describe the basic

structure of his theological proposal, brought to a "σύσστημα" in his *Theological Trilogy*. He proposes it in four steps.

a. *The real distinction*. It begins with "the 'real distinction' of St. Thomas," that is, with the fundamental human realization of one's own finitude: "I am, but I could not be. And many things that do not exist, could be". The essences, the *entities*, the things that exist are limited, while *being*, understood as *reality*, the act of being, the fact of existing, is not limited: being possesses an unlimited openness or disposition to exist, to realize entities. And the sum of all that exists does not exhaust the possibilities of existence. This is "the source of all religious and philosophical thought of humanity": the human being "exists as a limited being in a limited world, but his reason is open to the unlimited, to all being"[158] . This "real difference between being as reality and particular entities"[159] implies that "something that really is," something that exists, "does not possess [only] a part of real being itself, but [being] the whole of it," that is, it possesses existing itself in a complete form - it exists in the full sense of the word - even though "alongside it there are innumerable other real things"[160] that also exist in a complete form. And, further, it implies that this "whole of reality [= being] exists only in the fragment of a finite entity, but the fragment exists only through the whole of real being"[161] which brings it into existence.

Now, if each entity and the sum of all entities, even the possible ones, cannot give existence to themselves; and at the same time, being has no existence in itself, but always realizes itself in particular and limited entities; that means that no entity, nor being in itself, is sufficient for reality to exist. There must be still something more: an absolute being, subsistent by itself. Indeed, Balthasar affirms:

> That which comes to be, as such, has no existence in itself, therefore, neither can it unfold entities before itself, to realize itself in them, and yet in that which comes to be there must be the possibility of realizing itself in particular entities. This paradox refers to a foundation, which is both the quintessence of all reality and also has the subsistence required for the delineation of entities .[162]

That is to say, the insufficiency of being - as such - to exist by itself is what raises the need for an absolute foundation. It is clear then that "all human philosophy [...] is essentially, at the same time, religious

and theological, since it poses the problem of absolute being, regardless of whether it is attributed a personal or impersonal character"[163] . The paradox of *real distinction* inescapably poses the problem of absolute being. It is the old question as to why multiplicity exists, or why being and not nothingness. For Balthasar "no philosophy will be able to give a satisfactory answer to this question [...] The true answer to philosophy can only be given by being itself, revealing itself starting from itself"[164] , but at the same time, "in order to hear and understand the self-revelation of God, man must be in himself a search for God, a question put to him. Therefore, there is no biblical theology without a religious philosophy. Human reason must be open to the infinite"[165] . Here Balthasar's basic thought is inserted and the structure of his *Theological Trilogy* is understood: Christ as the answer to the ultimate philosophical question. For if Christ - as theological light - illumines the whole of reality, "this reflected light has caused properties of being to appear that are so evident to us, [and thus such aspects] could in turn shed light on that which illumines them"[166] .

b. *Being in its transcendentals*. Having posed the basic philosophical problem -being and its foundation-, Balthasar takes the second step, which he calls "meta-anthropology", that is, a reflection on "the question of being", but from "the essence of man". The starting point is the original human experience itself, when we become aware of ourselves, that we exist. There we discover that "man exists only in dialogue with his fellow man". This can be seen graphically in the first experience that a child has of himself, when he becomes aware of himself -that he exists as himself as distinct from others-. This is a triple experience: (1) of himself and (2) of his mother as distinct from him. But, in addition, in that same act, he perceives that his mother sustains him, smiles at him, that is to say, (3) she loves him. That is, he perceives that he is loved and that to exist is beautiful, is something good. It has been the I-thou relationship that has opened the space of the self, simultaneously with the space of being and love. In the mother, the you *and* the being in your totality are opened to him, along with becoming aware of himself as an individual and of

the love he has received. And knowing that what appears to him is the core of being and not pure appearance -it is really his mother-, "the horizon of the whole infinite being opens up for him in this encounter, revealing four things to him: 1st that he is *one* in love with his mother at the same time that she is not his mother, then all being is *one;* 2nd that this love is *good* and therefore all being is *good;* 3rd that this love is *true* and therefore all being is *true;* 4th that this love provokes *joy,* and therefore all being is beautiful"[167] . One, good, true and beautiful are the "transcendental attributes of being", characteristics that "surpass all the limits of essences and are coextensive with being"[168] . We can thus verify that the *dialogical* experience of the human being has led us to the transcendental characteristics of being, that is, to its most intimate structure.

c. *Polarity of the transcendentals of created being.* We said that the paradox of real distinction had opened us to absolute being, but in such a way that "there is an insurmountable distance between God and the creature" and, at the same time, there is "an analogy between them that cannot be resolved in any form of identity, then there must also be an analogy of the transcendentals between those of the creature and those of God"[169] . Here the third step of his *Theological Trilogy* is founded*:* it is the structuring of his theology and philosophy based on the transcendentals of being, since this is the form in which being is concretely found: in its transcendental attributes. The two principles that we have proposed as a foundation: the analogy of being, which speaks of reality as an image of the archetype; and being that is structured "concretely in its attributes (not categorical, but transcendental)," completely interrelated ("since the transcendentals traverse all being, they must be interior to one another: what is truly true is also truly good and beautiful and one")[170] ; they imply, in turn, three consequences for authentically understanding reality. On the one hand, in God, as absolute being and cause of being, these attributes must also exist in an absolute way; secondly, if these attributes have been discovered from the dialogical character of man, then we cannot deny God a fullness of dialogical capacity: to be word. And, thirdly, in the creature these transcendental characteristics can

only exist in a partial and limited way, that is, "polarized in the field of finitude"[171] .

Indeed, created being is *dual*: it is traversed by a constitutive and basic polarity, which implies a constant tension between the poles, but which, at the same time, is a tension that makes possible the development of its own being. Being as totality, "reality (*esse*) can only be one", insofar as being "is *'completum et simplex'*", but, on the other hand, that one reality, being, only subsists "in an infinity of entities", where each of those entities is, precisely, an in-divisible unity, an "*in-dividuum*". This dual tension between being -or totality- and entity -or individuality- makes both aspects mutually implicate each other and live from a mutual self-giving: "being provides the entity with its indivisibility, the entity provides being [...] with its realization"[172] . Balthasar has called this "an ontic love" (*eine ontische Liebe*): every entity gives itself to others and, at the same time, opens in itself a space for others. All entities, for their self-perfection, "need the space of others, where they must take shelter, without being able to claim this space from themselves"[173] . And the fact that others need me does not allow me to lord it over them, since I also need others in order to become aware of myself as distinct from others. All existence is finally experienced as a gift that is neither asked for nor demanded.

This constitutive polarity of every created entity will be reflected, later, also in beauty, insofar as "every worldly entity is epiphanic, precisely in the difference described." "The form of appearance of the entity is the way in which it expresses itself, a kind of atonic language [...], in which things not only express themselves, but always also [express] the total reality present in them, which (as *'non subsistens'*) refers to the subsistent real"[174] . This polarity consists in the fact that the real is always manifested or appears in a beautiful *form*, a form that "refers back to the reality that appears in it and at the same time transcends it. The polarity of the transcendent property of being beauty lies in this duality of form of light that rests in itself and of pointing beyond the form to an entity (real) that is illuminated in it"[175] . It is the duality that resides in the fact that being *appears* and *being* appears. Form refers to being and being can only appear in form. And

this form, along with manifesting being, at the same time somehow also conceals being. Being is what appears, but it is always more than what appears. And the fact that it manifests itself and gives itself away does not make it lose anything of itself.

The same polarity continues, necessarily, in the transcendental goodness, since "the transcendentals, which permeate all being, can only exist one in the other". We know that everything "that which is shown (beauty), is communicated, is given (good)", so that "everything good in the world also possesses a polar structure"[176] . Indeed, the good is that which, in some way, is desired, sought, needed. Thomas says that "*omnia bonum appetunt*" (= all things desire the good), "not only entities endowed with cognitive capacity, but also those incapable of knowing (De ver. 22,1)"[177] . In such a way that every entity aspires -consciously or unconsciously- to the good because it needs it or because it satisfies it. If this is so, then every entity, and the human being in particular, is obliged to give himself to others, since others need him, just as I myself need others. We all have the right to receive good from others. But since human beings ultimately need love (as the ultimate good), it follows that they have a right to love. Here then is the abysmal paradox of the human being: he possesses a right, without which he could neither be nor develop as a human being, but "which cannot be obtained by force, but only granted in free self-giving"[178] . Every human being, living necessarily in community, has need of love, but love, by definition, must be given to him only as an expression of freedom. Here we can see expressed the constitutive polarity of goodness: I have a right and a need for something that is given to me only as a free gift. This polarity can also be expressed from another perspective: the "obligation" of every human being to do good, which arises from the existence of others - what we call the objective norm of action - is in dual tension with the fact that this good - which is the relationship with other human beings - is to be realized "humanly" only from one's own subjective conscience. It is the radical polarity of every human being: I have to do good, but from my freedom, which will allow me to live according to my human condition.

Finally, as the culmination of beauty and goodness, there is truth, which is "self-declaration in word." But this witness to oneself "is more than merely expressing oneself in appearing or doing," since it "presupposes the strongest tension between perfect interiority in the freedom of self-consciousness and perfect manifestation" in a language that is, in addition to natural "gesticulation," "free creation," in which "the spiritual subject can make known his interiority"[179] . So now we have the polarity of truth: one's own free interiority in *dual* relation to the form of expression carried out by language, which is both natural (corporeal gesticulation) and invented (freedom in the form of expression). The human being can only show himself and give himself through the narrowness of words and symbolic language, but this poverty or limitation of language does not prevent him from truly communicating and really giving himself. Through "the narrowness of words linked to images, souls can meet and exchange"[180] . This is true, however, not only for the human being, but for every created entity. "Showing-itself and giving-itself must also already be, pre-humanly, inchoative forms of saying-itself"[181] . Here the fundamental phenomenon is the epiphanic character of being that transcends all its reality, since showing-itself, giving-itself and saying-itself are different aspects of appearing, which is understood only if one accepts the difference between "appearing and that which appears"[182] . "With this it is clear in what sense 'truth' constitutes the culmination of 'beauty' and 'goodness' and in what sense the latter must be at the same time the former"[183] . But all this is only "thinkable if [...] things themselves are 'words' spoken by an infinite free understanding, entities [...] which can only be said perfectly in man, who is an entity fit for speech"[184] . This means, ultimately, that "the entire, unabridged, metaphysics of the transcendentals of being can only be developed under the theological light of the creation of the world in the Word of God"[185] , without the metaphysics thereby becoming theology.

d. *A theology based on the transcendentals of being.* With this we have arrived at the fourth step, which is properly the theological structuring of the *Trilogy*. We have seen that "through the three transcendental modes runs a fundamental polarity", which in turn

"derives from the polarity of the unity that transcends everything". So there necessarily arises, due to the analogy of being, the question of the transcendentals also in absolute being: there the polarity "must be overcome in the absolutely one, true, good and beautiful" which is God. In absolute being the transcendentals are not eliminated, but coincide completely: "God's glory [= his beauty] is his self-giving and this is, on the other hand, his truth." And this identity is possible because God is "absolute freedom that possesses itself"[186] . The transcendentals of being do not end in God, but, on the contrary, reach their fullness in him and, therefore, the presence of these transcendentals of being in created reality is, in the first place, a *reflection* of the fact of being created by God according to the divine archetype. For this very reason, and due to the very analogy of being, "the power to show-itself, to give-itself, to say-itself of finite things does not belong to their indigence, but to their essential perfection as being"[187] , as image of God and, therefore, their prototype is the divine being.

From here Balthasar draws four methodological conclusions, which are the basis from which -novelly- he will structure his theological synthesis from the transcendentals of being: 1º Every created perfection, insofar as it is a divine reflection, must find its prototype in God himself. 2º The polarity of being, or ontological love, the basic structure of created reality, is in its intimate essence a created vestige of the presence of the Other also in God: the Word. This allows a creation and a revelation as God's self-donation. 3º The creation of all things *in* the Word of God is what allows God to speak through creation, and the human being to listen to his call. God appears, gives himself and expresses himself, in such a way that man responds in a way of freedom that welcomes and loves and understands. And that is Christianity: a permanent relationship of following in freedom. 4º The ultimate answer to the question of why there is a world will only find a satisfactory answer in the revelation of the Trinity and the incarnation .[188]

Thus, if philosophy - why there is being and not nothingness - "finds its ultimate answer only in the revelation of Christ"[189] , then a

particularly apt way to understand revelation - and that is exactly theology - is precisely to do so starting from the transcendentals of being as the basic structure of reality. In this way it becomes clearer that revelation responds authentically to the intimate constitution of creation -and particularly of the human being-, thus showing the universal and permanent character of this revelation. Precisely this has been Balthasar's objective: to deliver a theology that responds to the human being from his fundamental configuration. Hence he articulates his *Theological Trilogy* from the basic experience of every human being, which is his existence from the transcendentals: "A being *appears*, has an epiphany : it is beautiful and amazes us. When it appears*, it gives itself*, it surrenders itself: it is good. And in giving itself, *it says*, it reveals itself: it is true (in itself, but also in the other to whom it reveals itself)"[190] . In this same order, then, and from these same transcendentals, he develops his theological synthesis, which gives an account of the phenomenon of God's self-communication and of the human response.

In fact, it begins from beauty with a *theological Aesthetic,* called *Glory*, in which God appears to man in multiple forms, unexpectedly, and then in a culminating way in Jesus Christ[191] . But man, "blinded" for multiple reasons, must "learn to 'see' again"[192] . For this reason, this first part of the *Theological Trilogy* must deal with the encounter of Christ *-form* (*Gestalt*) of the Word of the Father made flesh- with man, starting from (and through) the action of the Holy Spirit, who opens his eyes anew. Thus we can understand why it is necessary to begin with the transcendental beauty: the *form* of the apparition. And the basic theological question of this first part will then be: "how to distinguish his apparition, his epiphany, among the many other phenomena of this world?"[193] .

He then continues with a *theological drama*, a *Theo-dramatic*. The one who has been "touched by the splendor of Christ" and, in him, by the love of the Father, must be led so that he can give an existential response appropriate to the encounter he has experienced[194] . The human response to God is simply a recognition of the demand that comes with having experienced God's gratuitous love through his

Trinitarian self-giving. And this "demand" "is nothing other than the gift" of God that frees us to give "an adequate response to God in the one and only two principal commandments": love of God and neighbor[195] . Thus the theme here is the transcendental "goodness". This whole part examines the "dramatic" relationship between divine freedom and human freedom[196] . And at the center of this drama is Christ, as sent by the Father and led by the Spirit, so that this whole part is equally Trinitarian. The great theological question of this second part of the *Trilogy* is the reflection on how it is possible that God can continue to be absolute freedom, if he creates and allows the existence of a relative freedom, that of the human being; and on the other hand, how can a relative freedom be realized, without God ceasing to be really God? This is the core of the Theo-drama -and of the entire *Theological Trilogy*- and it is also the core of all human history and of Christianity . [197]

And it ends with the transcendental "truth": a *theological logic*, a *Theo-logic*. "Man is not only a being who perceives and acts, but also who thinks, speaks, formulates"[198] . "In the first two parts, it was presupposed as given the fact that God can make himself comprehensible to man and enable him to follow him." Now this assumption must be taken over. Then the question arises as to "how the infinite truth of God and of his Logos can be apt to be expressed in the narrow vessel of human logic, not only vaguely and approximately, but adequately"[199] . Therefore, "if it has been said before that there is no Christian praxis without the light and norm of a theory, to end, one must reflect on how such praxis can also be expressed and justified in human words and concepts." The answer is necessarily Trinitarian. Theology, strictly speaking, is born of God himself, who has revealed himself, and therefore expressed himself, in his Word made flesh (Jn 1:14), and at the same time has enabled human beings to understand and accept him, through the power and light of the gift of the Holy Spirit. And yet, paradoxically, "the God who truly and unreservedly explains himself does not cease for that reason to be Mystery"[200] . The great challenge of this third part, which is somewhat shorter than the previous ones, will be how God can

make himself truly and really understood by mankind, without ceasing to be the ineffable God.

He ends with an *Epilogue*, "something like a perspective that encompasses the whole work", where he tries to justify - as we have done here - this completely different way of presenting theological treatises starting from the transcendentals of being, "in which the passage from true (and therefore religious) philosophy to the biblical theology of revelation is given in the easiest possible way"[201] .

II. A global look at the *Trilogy*

General structure of the work

The *Theological Trilogy*, a culminating work and, at the same time, a work of synthesis, is structured on the basis of the three transcendentals mentioned above, beauty, goodness and truth, but strictly in that order because it is the one that corresponds to the daily experience of every human being, which also includes the experience of God's revelation.

1. Theological aesthetics. It begins, then, with the transcendental beauty: "Our initial word is called beauty"[202] ; and titles this first part *Gloria. A Theological Aesthetics*. It is composed of seven volumes, which are divided into four major sections. The first volume -and first section- (*The Perception of Form*), of more than 600 pages, is a long and extended explanation of beauty as a theological concept -which serves as an introduction to this first part of the *Trilogy*-, and which, in essence, is a fundamental theology based on beauty. In effect, the transcendental beauty means that the whole of reality comes out to meet us and impacts us. Before we have turned to anything that exists, that reality has already appeared to us and placed itself before us. Everything that exists, that is beautiful, impacts our eyes and our being, and invites us to make a response: to welcome that manifestation and act accordingly. Well, this is also the basic structure of revelation: Jesus comes out to meet us, with his form (*Gestalt*) that has an impact, that is, his way of life that challenges us; to which we must respond with faith. This is the theme of this first volume: the intimate relationship between the form of Jesus (words and actions) and the human response (faith and following).

The second section consists of two volumes (*Ecclesiastical Styles* and *Lay Styles*) and is a series of examples, throughout the Christian tradition, of authors who have done - not necessarily consciously - a theology based on transcendental beauty. Since his proposal is quite

novel, it seemed important to him, in the following, to illustrate what he said in the first volume. Ecclesiastical styles refer to authors (Irenaeus, Augustine, Dionysius, Anselm and Bonaventure) who explicitly wanted to elaborate a *theology* which, in its beauty, *radiated* the glory of God; instead the lay styles refer to authors (Dante, John of the Cross, Pascal, Hamann, Soloviev, Hopkins and Péguy), who in their literary works and with a speech in prose or poetry, have manifested, with a human language, the "divine glory worldly manifested"[203] (in human love or in the beauty of the forms). And it does not refer, therefore, to the state of life of the authors. They are all authors who have thematically developed the experience of the "illumination of the sublime, of the glorious of God" "in the unclassifiable, totally other, of Christ"[204] , starting from multiple literary and theological elaborations that are truly apt to reflect this ineffable beauty . And it is not by chance that the ecclesiastical styles range from the second to the thirteenth century, and the lay styles from the thirteenth to the twentieth century. For Balthasar, after the great scholasticism, theology became detached from beauty; and with Dante, a new way of doing theology appears.

The third section also consists of two volumes (*Metaphysics: Ancient* and *Modern Ages*), written in the form of a history of metaphysics, from Homer to the twentieth century. There the aim is to show the necessary unity that must exist - and in fact does exist in a unique way - between adherence to Christ as the revealer of the Father and universal adherence to the whole metaphysical-religious truth of humanity[205] . This is an unavoidable point of support for any divine revelation, since, otherwise, this manifestation from on high would not respond to the constitutive structures of the human being and his world. Here we review, throughout history, the profound relationship between theology and metaphysics, which allows us to find in the "human structure itself a pre-understanding"[206] of the revelation of the Word made flesh.

It culminates in the formal study of biblical revelation, always under the transcendental beauty. God has manifested himself to men and his beauty is, here, his *glory*, which is nothing other than the *divinity* of

God. Worldly beauty is transfigured into divine glory. Hence the title assigned to this great first part of the *Trilogy* (*Glory. A Theological Aesthetic*). This fourth section also consists of two volumes: *Old Testament* and *New Testament.* It is a question here of tracing the history of salvation, understood as an encounter of God with humanity, where it is precisely an encounter with what is specific and proper to God and which distinguishes him from all that is not-God. It is the encounter with the inscrutable glory of God manifested "terrifyingly" in the Old Testament, but which then appears, in Christ, under the humble and stripped form of the flesh and of the cross.

In short, a *theological Aesthetics* is the presentation of the revelation of God in the humble form of Christ, who - unexpectedly - manifests himself to man, impacting him with his glory-beauty, establishing a permanent alliance with him and inviting him to an act of faith and permanent following. For his part, the human being is able to perceive this manifestation of God because God himself accompanies him with his grace and, at the same time, has been pre-disposed in his fundamental structures for the daily encounter with the beauty of creation. Theological aesthetics means, then, theological reflection on the primacy of God, who paradoxically comes to meet man as beauty-glory in the man without beauty who is Christ (Is 53:2).

Theodramatics. The response of the human being to the manifestation of God is always an existential response, that is to say, one that involves his being and his entire history, until the last day of his life. That is why this second part of the *Trilogy* must now deal with the joint *action* of God with man, in Christ. That is precisely what the word δρᾶμα (= drama or action) means: an action which, in this case, is that of Christ *and* of the human being in Christ. From hence it is called "Theo-drama". And as can be easily perceived, this is the development of the transcendental *goodness,* since every action of God and man always seeks the good and is an expression of one's own goodness, that is, of love. It is important to emphasize here that, although methodologically it is necessary to treat the three transcendentals successively, it is obvious that in everyday reality the three transcendentals occur simultaneously: the manifestation of God

and the response of man are, together, a single and complex permanent action. And so will be their explanation as a manifestation of truth.

The *Theodramatica* is composed of five volumes. It begins with an extensive *Prolegomena,* where he exposes and explains all the literary instruments, taken from the theater, which will be useful to explain the drama (i.e. action), which is the existential relationship of man with God in Christ. Together with the structuring from the transcendentals, this use of the language of drama is one of the great novelties and notable contributions of Balthasar to contemporary theology. This volume only gathers preparatory elements for theology, however, obliquely, it makes transparent the thematic that follows: the fact that there is in the theater something like a "structure of representation" in movement and that it expresses very well how life is. In synthesis, the role of the actor is an excellent image of the mission or vocation that every human being is called to unfold on the stage of his life.

Volumes 2 and 3 form a unit, in two parts, which exposes *The Persons of the Drama.* Volume two, *Man in God,* and volume three, *Man in Christ.* The first of these is a kind of philosophical-theological anthropology, which teaches who the human person is, his place in the created spatio-temporal context and, above all, his finite freedom in relation to the infinite freedom of God. This is the human being who interacts with God on the basis of the vocation and mission received. Volume three, divided into two fundamental parts, begins with a Christology based on a theme that is fundamental for Balthasar: the unity of person and mission in Christ. This is the main character of the whole drama, and in which all the other characters have their part to play. The second part of the volume, exposes the other theological characters involved in the drama: first of all, Mary, as the adequate response to Christ; the Church, which is the unification of individuals; and the angels and demons, with a rather marginal presence in the drama. He ends the volume by reflecting on the action of the Trinitarian God in the world, the core of the whole Theo-drama.

The fourth volume describes *the action,* the drama itself. It is the

soteriology, which evidently cannot be separated from the two previous volumes. The same characters already mentioned appear again, but now in the aspect of their action. Here the "*pro nobis*" of the Son of God made flesh is presented to its ultimate consequences. The key concept will be that of "substitution" (*Stellvertretung*): Jesus takes our place as sinners and assumes all its consequences, up to the descent into hell and the abandonment of the Father. It is a profound reflection from the Apocalypse, as a permanent struggle between good and evil, which reflects the permanent *pathos* (love and "agony") of God in Christ, as well as , which reflects the immeasurable love of the Trinitarian God for human beings. This volume contains some of the most important themes for Balthasar - in dependence on Adrienne von Speyr - and which are characteristic of his entire theological work.

It ends - the fifth volume - with *The Last Act,* which reflects on the ultimate motive of all this drama: the growing *no* of the world in the face of the growing *yes* of God. He then exposes and develops, to its ultimate consequences, the final solution brought by the cross: the fundamental embrace (*Unterfassung*) of all men and women throughout history. But if divine freedom does not force, but persuades, extreme rejection and condemnation always remain possible. This is a great treatise on eschatology, but not in the classical way (= from the *novissima*), but from the Trinity and Christian hope[207] . The true *novissimum* to which we are called to arrive is the *Trinitarian life;* and what moves this whole journey is the profound theological hope, not only ours, but above all that of the Father and the Spirit, that the mission of the Son will be successful in all human beings.

Theodramatics, in a few words, is a compendium of the redemptive work of God, in Christ, developed from the interrelation between the infinite freedom of God and the finite freedom of man, in all its historical course, from creation to the definitive encounter with the Trinitarian God in eternity. It is the unfolding of the goodness-love of God and man.

Theological. The *Trilogy* ends with the *Theological.* It is shorter, in comparison with the two previous parts. Perhaps as a result of the

weariness of the years, but, above all, because in the interpenetration of the transcendentals among themselves, many of the things that now correspond to the transcendental *truth* have already been said in the previous 12 vols. Here it is a question of explaining how the manifestation and action of God in the world can be understood by the human being. This is why it is called *Theo-logic* (= to speak of God as an explanation of God). It wants to show how a divine truth can be expressed within the structures of created truth, in other words, how the human being, created, finite, can understand something of the absolute, infinite and invisible God[208] . It consists of 3 vols. .[209]

He begins with the reprinting of a volume he had written in 1947, in which he already intended to do a "theology", but which he was never able to continue, partly because of the biographical events of those years[210] . It is an excellent introduction to philosophical epistemology and he calls it *Truth of the World.* For Balthasar, there is a "pre-understanding already in the structures of intramundane truth"[211] for the understanding of the truth revealed by Christ in the Holy Spirit. Therefore, at this point, he will develop the structures of human knowledge. Here it is affirmed that truth exists as a transcendental determination of being and, therefore, also as a property of knowledge. He will dedicate these pages to expose the essence of truth in four of its fundamental characteristics: truth as nature, as freedom, as mystery and as participation. If every human being can know the truth, then God can also speak to him through created structures.

The next two volumes clarify how the infinite word of God can be expressed through human words and, at the same time, be understood by the human spirit, without its meaning being diminished. The second volume, *Truth of God,* deals with how God, through the incarnation of the Logos, comes to be understood definitively and truthfully by men. From a Johannine perspective, it points to the Son as God's self-explanation to the world. It is an interesting treatise on the incarnation as hermeneutics. It deals with the possibilities of Christology as the self-expression of the Logos in the language of the flesh. Christ is "the explainer of God as God is in himself, [who] unveils in his own visibility the invisible God, but at the same time

maintains his paternal invisibility"[212] . And the third volume, *The Spirit of Truth*, is completely linked and related to the previous one, since in order to understand the Incarnate Word we need the Holy Spirit who interprets him and who, moreover, was already at work in Jesus himself, leading him. This volume is therefore a sort of pneumatology, but it should be noted that the Holy Spirit has been explicitly present in all the previous treatises. Two major themes appear here: the relationship of the Spirit with the Son, and his soteriological character with us.

Theology, as an unfolding of the transcendental truth, is a hermeneutic that gives an account of how God can be understood by creatures.

He ends the *Trilogy* with a brief appendix volume, called *Epilogue*, which provides a general overview of the entire work, but is not a summary. In three successive steps he explains and justifies the work he has just finished, starting from the principle that what is capable of integrating the most things is the truest[213] . If Christianity is able to demonstrate that its two fundamental truths, the Trinity and the incarnation, are capable of integrating and explaining all other truths and worldly longings, then it will be fruitful and will endure until the end of history. This is the goal of his *opus magnum*.

As can be seen, although this is a work of synthesis of all theology, it is not structured according to the classical scheme of the various theological treatises, but rather that of the three transcendentals. However, during the development of the work, one can perceive that he gradually examines the different theological treatises[214] . In fact, he exposes some philosophical presuppositions, both an epistemology (*Theology* I) and a metaphysics (*Gloria* IV and V). He develops a good biblical theology (*Gloria* VI and VII). He devotes a long volume to a novel fundamental theology (*Gloria* I). And he develops the most important treatises of systematic theology: Trinity (*Theodramatics* III, IV and V), Christology (*Gloria* VII, *Theodramatics* III and *Theology* II), Pneumatology (*Gloria* VII and *Theology* III), Soteriology (*Theodramatics* IV), Ecclesiology (*Theodramatics* III), Mariology (*Theodramatics* III), Aspects of Creation (*Theodramatics* III), Theological Anthropology

(*Theodramatics* II) and Eschatology (*Theodramatics* V). Of course, these are not complete treatises - in the manner of a manual - but rather expositions of certain central theological aspects of the theme, which allow us to understand the core of the subject and which underline the features that Balthasar considers central to his work and to a correct understanding of Christianity.

Gloria. A theological aesthetics

Having reviewed the general structure of the *Trilogy*, we will now present in more detail the fundamental content of each of the volumes. It is not a summary of them[215] , but a presentation of the most relevant themes of Balthasar, exposing, above all, their most characteristic aspects, in order to have a more global idea of Balthasar's thought expressed in this great work.

Vol. 1: The perception of form. It consists of an *Introduction*, which basically explains what is understood by theological aesthetics, and the body of the volume, divided into two parts: *The subjective evidence* (faith) and *The objective evidence* (the form of Christ). In the *Introduction* he expresses his starting point and final purpose. The starting point is beauty as an original phenomenon. This means that the human being is properly a *form,* through which his spirit and his freedom are expressed, in such a way that they are identified with that same form. Thus the whole of human existence is a *form.* In this way, Christian existence is also a form, but as an image radiating from the "archetype of Christ" and "formed by the power of the creative Spirit"[216] . Moreover, all that is beautiful possesses two related moments: form and splendor. As form, all that is beautiful has a harmony-an order or structure-as totality; but if it is beautiful, it is so precisely because it indicates and is the appearance of a depth and a fullness that is invisible and unseen, but which shines forth in the form itself. That is the essence of the beautiful form. That is why the form of the beautiful has that marvelous capacity to pass from the mundane to the supernatural and to allow the supernatural to pass through the mundane. Hence the purpose of a theological aesthetics: to provide a theology-which is at once fundamental and dogmatic-as a

doctrine of the perception of the form of the God who reveals himself, coupled with a doctrine of rapture on the part of the human being who-in the face of that form-allows himself to be carried away by the love of God. "Aesthetics as a doctrine of the incarnation of the glory of God and of the elevation of man to participation in it"[217] .

The subjective evidence refers to the Christian *faith*. It begins by explaining *The Light of Faith.* The fundamental principle on which theological aesthetics is affirmed is the realization that, in the Christian case, faith and the content of faith mutually imply each other. The reason is simple: because it is a faith *in God* and not in something else. The subjective act of faith always includes all the objective content to which this act is directed and from which it can be understood and justified[218] . But this presupposes looking at things from the transcendental beauty, in order to understand faith as a theological act of perception, where the exterior form and the interior light of faith are harmoniously integrated. For the Christian faith, the central form of evidence, on which all other forms depend, is the perception of the objective form of God, in Jesus Christ, which is not believed but *seen.* Thus, Christianity is the unsurpassable model of all aesthetics and, for this reason, the aesthetic religion par excellence, since in the Christian mystery the external form of Christ is not opposed to the infinite light of God, which radiates in that same form and illuminates from faith.

And then he explains how *the experience of faith* is given. If faith is the encounter of the whole person-in his concrete existence-with God, then the only authentic model of faith must be the concrete act of existence of Jesus himself, true God and true man. And if faith is harmony and adaptation of the whole human existence to God, then it can very well be called - and properly is - obedience. But obedience is not opposed to the experience of the beautiful, because just as in art, the laws of obedience are not imposed from the outside, but are articulated from within faith and following. And this is all the more true when we understand that the archetype-the Logos-becomes man and represents in himself the archetype of every human being and of the whole world. Christian faith and obedience are, in reality, the

growth of one's own existence in the existence of Christ, where the Holy Spirit articulates the Christian form from within man. And this is a movement from the totality of the subject that allows the totality of Christ's form to be imprinted on himself. All this, as a consequence, implies *sensibility,* since the experience of faith in God is marked by the fact that the invisible has become visible in the incarnation and, as a piece of the world, acquires the character of an archetype. Thus, faith possesses an unavoidable sensitive character. Faith is configuration to the archetype from the sensitive perception, whether of Christ, or - in a partial way - of the Church. Hence the long Christian tradition that speaks of and experiences the "spiritual senses"[219] , which investigates the spiritual totality of being - of theological root - that is expressed in form.

The objective evidence refers to the form of the revelation in which we believe: Jesus the Christ. This form is inseparable from the subjective evidence, that is, from faith. Indeed, faith as subjective experience finds its raison d'être and its justification in an experiential and sensible object. This is why Balthasar now develops, in five major aspects, the theme of objective revelation that conditions and determines faith. In the first place, he affirms that what is decisive in this *Necessity of an objective form of revelation* is that the form-splendor is not separated or distinguished from what Jesus himself is as man and as God. Jesus *is* - corporeally - the glory of God: "he who has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn 14:9). In the man Jesus the glory of God is made visible, therefore, to the extent that this man is God himself, the reading of this form is something unique, as is his person. Secondly, *the form of revelation,* whether in created reality or in the Word, is under that never-resolved paradox that is proper to the mystery of beauty: that which is manifested is, in its manifestation, that which, at the same time, is not manifested, that is to say, it is simultaneously manifestation and concealment. This is so because the God who reveals himself is the absolute being, who is the "completely other" (*Ganz Andere*), but also and precisely because of this, he is the "not-other-thing-else" (*Non-aliud*)[220] . God, even if he truly reveals himself, remains the incomprehensible one, and even, in eternity, seeing him

face to face, he will remain the ever incomprehensible one. And hence there is no contradiction in saying that faith is, in a certain way, a seeing of the mystery without, for that reason, ending its character of mystery. Thirdly, *Christ is the center of the form of revelation*, that is, he is the one through whom the form receives connection and comprehensibility in its totality. This center cannot be measured from outside, that is, it cannot be judged by other criteria external to itself, but its evidence springs only from the phenomenon itself. It is itself the measure of everything else and measures itself by the harmony between its existence and its mission. Therein is verified the descent of God to the flesh and the ascent of the flesh to the spirit. His truthfulness springs from himself. *The mediation of form* is the fourth aspect. The form of Christ comes to us through the mediation of Scripture and the Church. The Word and the Sacrament thus refer back to the ecclesial form in which they find their fulfillment. But to the Church belongs no other form than that which is relative to and indicative of the principal form of revelation. The Church, although distinguished from Christ, can attribute to herself no other form than that of Christ himself, and it is this form that must be impressed on each of the members, insofar as it is an imitation of the archetype. Finally, he expounds *The witness of the form*: the form of Jesus is not witnessed from the exterior, but from the interior. It is a witness to the Father, insofar as he constitutes the image of the Son and, at the same time, shows his loving relationship with him. History and the cosmos also bear witness to this form by allowing themselves to be informed by God's self-revelation.

Vol. 2: Ecclesiastical styles. The ecclesiastical styles are concrete examples that give historical color to the theoretical propositions just presented. They are diverse theologies that have radiated "the divine glory from the first form of revelation," but they have done so from its internal form - its splendor - not from the external, literary, formal configuration. "Every new and original form always bursts forth from the center, it also has its *kairos* in a given historical context"[221] , and it does so in very varied ways. For Balthasar, "only a beautiful theology, that is, a theology which, having attained *the glory of God,* succeeds in

its turn in making it shine forth, has the possibility of influencing human history, impressing and transforming it"[222] . Balthasar chooses five key authors - among many others - who have elaborated a theology with a beautiful style, which radiates the glory of God from within. The reasons he gives for such a choice are as follows: "*Irenaeus* presents himself as the founder of ecclesiastical theology," stressing "God's glorious creation" and his "marvelous" "temporal salvific economy." *"Augustine* closes Western patristics, carrying out the return of Plotinus to Christ, finishing off, understanding and surpassing the previous thought", "and establishing for a millennium the theological aesthetics on its basic formulas". *"Dionysius,* the Syrian monk of Antiquity, translates in the East the philosophical image of the world of Proclus into an image of the world theological-Christian", determining an absolutely aesthetic image of the world. "*Anselm,* who investigates with Benedictine style, is aesthetic in a new and original way", by understanding the world from his "spiritual intuition of measure and right proportion", which depends entirely on the inexplicable freedom and love of God. Finally, "*Bonaventure*'s theology unites Augustine and the Areopagite in the spirit of St. Francis" to discover "the mysteries of glory of the simple heart, of Jesus, of the Poverello, of God himself"[223] .

Balthasar will dedicate some 60 pages to each of these five authors, exposing some fundamental elements of their theological form, which allow the splendor of God's glory to radiate, thus showing themselves to be true theological aesthetics. Their content is, in itself, divine expression: divine glory worldly manifested. In what follows, in a brief paragraph for each of the authors, we will exemplify how Balthasar determines the beauty of these theologies. At the core of these five authors is their ability to embrace the totality of creation as a unity, in their ability to express the divinity of God, albeit from very different perspectives. That is why they are theological aesthetics, that is, theologies based on beauty as a created expression of the glory of God.

Irenaeus (2nd century) affirms the unity of reality and marks everywhere the continuity between nature and grace, between the

world and God. For him, theology is to see that which is, but to see it as a whole, in a compendium, in a synthetic apprehension that includes all of creation and history. Hence the importance of the Pauline concept of the *recapitulation* of all things in Christ (Eph 1:10). This implies that all reality can be seen as a unity because it has an articulating and unifying axis: Christ, the Logos made flesh. The second fundamental idea of Irenaeus is his understanding of the world as the Father's work of art, shaped by his hands - the Son and the Spirit - who have left their traces in all creation. Hence the world is *capax gloriae Patris* (= capable of the Father's glory). Hence the other fundamental concept for Irenaeus is that of *economy*, understood as the history of salvation, where the human being is called to progress gradually, thanks to the Spirit, until he becomes like the Son in order to be able to see the Father. One can perceive that Irenaeus is imbued with an aesthetic language: theology is the capacity to see God's work of art.

In the theology of *Augustine* (354-430) we find three characteristics that make it capable of radiating the glory of God and, therefore, make it a true theological aesthetic. In the first place, the fact that he dedicated all his efforts to confess God as supreme beauty and that he understood human life as an *eros* (= love) that must always seek - insatiably - truth and goodness. He does everything with enthusiasm and with a heart inflamed with love, which sees God at work in the world and in his own life. Secondly, he understands the multiplicity of the world "on the basis of the unity of God and his light"[224] . Hence any criticism of divine Providence regards it simply as a not seeing, an aesthetic defect. It is a matter, instead, of possessing a gaze-from *eros-that* permits a contemplation of the totality of the world, from the supreme position of divine Providence, and can thus see the harmony and beauty of multiplicity. Finally, for Augustine, thinking implies understanding, which is hierarchically superior to living and being. With this he discovers within consciousness the primordial order of the world and recognizes a primacy, a hierarchy, in thinking and being, which leads him to God: "This gaze sees God in all things, which are what they are by participation in an unconditioned being,

life and spirit, and cannot see them except insofar as they participate in God. But it also sees God above them all, because God can found all things insofar as he is none of them"[225] .

Dionysius (5th century) develops a theology from liturgy and worship, aesthetic expressions of the highest level. From there he contemplates history and, in it, revelation, from a perspective that is both a-temporal and pan-temporal. For him, Christianizing the neo-Platonism of Proclus, everything is understood as the movement that arises from being and returns to being and thus imitates divine love which, out of love, goes out of itself into the multiplicity of the world, and then draws everything to itself. Life is a way back to God, from where we have come out. Here is the aesthetic key: the exit from being (or from God) is an *appearing*, a manifestation of that which does not appear and which is always greater. It is the splendor of a mysterious depth, but where there is a proportion between what appears and what does not appear. In short, creation and revelation are an appearing of the hidden God, to embrace everything and bring it back to itself, where it belongs.

Anselm (1033-1109) carries out a theology that - in its aesthetic quality - perceives in the action of God a profound harmony and the perfection of proportions. It is based on the realization that revelation *has to be as* it is, since it is a manifestation of the intimate reality of God. God, in his freedom, acts as he is. It is a contemplation that shows the necessary reasons for revelation but which, at the same time, are born of the supreme and absolute freedom of God. This shows the beauty of God's acting in *this way*, which is born of both his being and his freedom, mysteriously and sublimely integrated. His theology is thus guided by the criterion of the beautiful accuracy of things. And since, moreover, there is an analogy between God and the creature, he concludes that, if in God there is identity between being and freedom to be himself, then every human being, in his freedom, has to walk every day to become what he should be, that is, to become what he ought to be. This is the criterion that drives the whole history of salvation: the beauty of freely returning to the exactness, proportion and harmony of things.

Finally, *Bonaventure* (1217-1274), faithful son of St. Francis, has an image of the world that is totally Christocentric. So too will be his theology. The human being is authentically understood only from God and his revelation. Indeed, the Son is the archetype of everything, the quintessence of all the ideas of the world. Herein lies its aesthetic quality: the image of Christ, present in the human person, is an impression made by God and, at the same time, an expression of God in him; but also, this image is before man so that he can assimilate it. Thus, the world is perceived as an image and beautiful expression of God who, in spite of this, still needs revelation to become fully like his beautiful archetype. Bonaventure's theology, as a doctrine of the expression of the Father and of the harmony and unity of things in Christ, is at the same time a doctrine of beauty.

Vol. 3: Lay styles. Now he presents seven other concrete examples, whose literary work also reveals the glory of God, but here from other worldly categories. The authors chosen and the reasons he gives for doing so are the following: *Dante,* who "constitutes the hardly noticed passage from monastic-clerical theology to a lay theology," because "he puts for the first time in the history of the Christian spirit the mystery of an eternal love of man and woman. *Eros* is purified through agape [= oblative love] and rises [...] to the throne of God". *John of the Cross,* where "everything is based on pure faith, which, in the darkness of its extreme privation, jealous of the mystery of the most luminous love of God and of the eternal nuptials, reveals it". *Pascal,* who "stretches an arc between pure theological faith and modern metaphysics and the science of nature, but in such a way that [...] he arrives at a vision of man [...] in Christ crucified, he arrives at a proportion starting from disproportions [...], which infuses in the casual devoid of rule the form and the rule". *Hamann* "celebrates in prophetic intuitions the *kenosis* [= abasement] of Christ and the humiliation of the Holy Spirit in the servile form of human nature and the letter of Scripture and, in the same brushstroke, the glorification of the flesh and the letter as definitive and unsurpassable bearers of the Logos and the Pneuma". *Soloviev* is "a thinker of comprehensive intelligence who anticipates the vision of Teilhard de Chardin and in

part rectifies it". *Hopkins*, from poetic aesthetics, shows the profound unity "between image and concept, myth and revelation, intuition of God in nature and in the history of salvation". *Péguy*, claiming "to have found the point at which the attempts" of communism and the Church "converge without rupture", "tries to expound [...] Christian theology until it is once again comprehensible to future humanity"[226] . The central feature of all these authors has been their genius for making the glory of God transparent in their literature, starting from their own personal experience. With different literary genres, each one of them, with a worldly language, left their own experience of the God who had come to meet them in their own worldly experience. Whatever the theme they deal with, they give a glimpse of the presence and guidance of God and the irradiation of his glory in the human experience.

Dante (1265-1321) proposes a new form of theology based on human love. The reflection and experience of his deep love for Beatrice guides him in his literary creation and, in it, the beloved woman appears showing him the way to salvation. With this, Dante takes a turn towards the vulgar, insofar as what is alive and present every day and where nothing human and nothing divine is left out. He interprets everything lay and vernacular in theological key and in its capacity to lead to God. In short, *eros* is what leads him to ethics, thus showing the primacy of concrete personal existence over any other essentialist consideration of the world. This is the great aesthetic novelty of Dante: Beatrice, with her love as a woman, reflects in her eyes the love of God, internally interweaving aesthetics and ethics and understanding ethics as the just behavior of the existing being.

John of the Cross (1542-1591) elaborates a mystical poetry crossed by an aesthetic paradox: from the renunciation of everything, beauty is found in everything. From his experience of personal faith, through a path of purification of all worldly attachment, he experiences that God alone is enough, since man exists for the Absolute. But this - paradoxically - by reducing everything to God *alone*, recovers the whole world for him through love. Thus, the world acquires its beauty from above and the contemplative sees the beauty of God *in* the world

and sees the beauty of the world *in* God. Renouncing all creatural beauty, he recovers all the forms of the world, now as interpretations of God's properties. His poetry about the created -mountains, trees and vegetables- is a true *analogia entis* (= analogy of being) of beauty.

Pascal (1623-1662) attempts a synthesis between the religious sense and the modern exact science of nature. In doing so, he offers an aesthetic vision of reality that values the right form, the exact measure, the right relationship, which implies an overall view from above. For Pascal thinking is also seeing, which means grasping the thing at a glance, with a single glance. This implies that thinking-seeing is done, as a whole, with the body, the spirit and charity. Hence the center of this gaze is the heart of man, which is the sensorium of totality and synthesis. This is the "honest man"[227] , who can observe both God and the world, which, although destroyed by its contradictions, has found its true conciliation in Jesus. It is an aesthetic of *justesse*, insofar as exactitude and correctness.

Hamann (1730-1788) "represents a Protestant theological aesthetic"[228] in which the God-man is the key that opens God and opens the world. Indeed, for Hamann, creation and nature are language and self-message of God, but under the *kenosis* of the word of God in nature and of the Son and the Holy Spirit in Scripture. This *kenosis* is, in reality, an expression of God's love and of his glory, because it is the only possibility that his manifestation can take place. In synthesis, his theology is structured on the basis of two principles. On the one hand, analogy: since God is the first cause, then "everything that happens in the world is divine" and "everything divine is also human"[229] . And, on the other hand, the human being, as God's work of art that crowns the whole revelation of God's glory, and Christ, as the measure of everything and its precision. For him, the incarnation is the canon of all aesthetics.

Soloviev (1853-1900) proposes an understanding of the evolution and universal history of the world as a progressive-eschatological incorporation of the divine idea in the human reality , but where the subject of the process is not identified with God, but is a universal subject distinct from God: the *sophia*, as *anima mundi*. With this, God

and the world are not identified and, nevertheless, the omnipotence of God triumphs in affirming his totality in the opposite of himself: the created. In this process, with the appearance of Christ, humanity encounters what it was seeking, Christ thus becoming the operative principle of history and progress, the result of which must be the divinized man. All of nature and history become comprehensible only from Christ. We can call this "a universal theological aesthetics of the God who becomes the world"[230] .

Hopkins (1844-1889), in his poetry, although he discovers beauty in all planes of existence, places his accent "on the unmistakable of the individual being"[231] , be it that of a genius or that of a common man. It is the simple and unrepeatable majesty of singularity, which arises from the relationship between the free God and the fully personified creature. Indeed, all things are unique because they are all sustained by an inner force that corresponds to their form, to their structure, which is unrepeatable and, in itself, beautiful. This unrepeatability is the act in which God chooses a creature and gives it its uniqueness and, in it, a nature that makes it act as the yes that it is. Freedom and relationship with God is what makes a human being unique and beautiful. This is a theological aesthetic of the singular.

Finally, in *Péguy* (1873-1914), Balthasar highlights two fundamental features of his work. First, for him, "aesthetics and ethics are [...] identical in substance, and are so by virtue of the incarnation of God in Christ" because, on the one hand, "the spiritual must become flesh, the invisible must show itself in form"; as on the other, "on the plane of the world [there] cannot be just that which before God is neither just nor has justification"[232] . And, secondly, he understands life, his work and literary work as a "representing", a "making present to another, who in turn makes present or represents the people, profane and holy, giving it a palpable concreteness as a datum". "*To represent* says to go out for others, for everyone, to present oneself for them", that is, it is solidarity, love and service. His poetry is an unlimited ethical and aesthetic work .[233]

After reading these two volumes, which present 12 authors, the important thing is not to dwell on the details of their content, but to

have perceived, in concrete examples, what a theological aesthetics really means. It is not an *aesthetic theology*, that is, theological reflections on a formal aesthetics; but a *theological aesthetics*, that is, a theological reflection *from beauty* as an essential characteristic of reality. It is a theology *from* beauty and not *about* beauty. However, the reading of each of these authors also allows us to get a very fair idea of the essential content of each one of them.

Vol. 4: In the space of metaphysics. Antiquity. After a brief *Introduction* to the two volumes on *The Space of Metaphysics*, he divides this volume on *Antiquity* into two parts: the *Foundations*, or classical pre-Christian metaphysics, and the *Consequences*, or patristic and medieval Christian philosophy. In the *Introduction*, he justifies the relationship between the pre-human understanding of beauty and the reception of biblical glory with two ideas that structure the treatise. First, a theology is not possible without constant reference to metaphysics, understood as knowledge of the origin and transcendental being (true, good and beautiful) of things, since, to be relevant, the universality of biblical glory must meet the universality of creation. Here the methodological criterion is that of integration. And, secondly, metaphysics is inseparable from theology because God cannot act outside the transcendental laws of creation. And if being, understood as the ultimate founding element of the multiplicity of the world, only becomes perceptible in a certain entity, in a beautiful form, which always refers back to the luminous mystery of being in its totality, then the beauty of being is apt and available for the revelation of the foundation of that totality.

He presents the *Fundamentals* in three historically consecutive parts: *Myth*, *Philosophy* and *Religion*. In *Myth* -reviewing Homer, the poets and the tragedians-, in which art, religion, cosmos and human being are united, the human being is interpreted in his relationship with the divine, which gives him his understanding and his essence[234] . In tragedy, for example, the character who faces with perseverance the frailties and pains of life, makes his fame shine, which is like a part of eternity attached to the mortal part of a transcendent action. In the myth, everything is referred to a totality that is beyond the human

being; call this, god, virtue or destiny.

In *Philosophy*, he reviews the passage from myth to philosophy and then dwells on Plato and his concept of beauty. Philosophy, as reason that interrogates itself about being, surpasses myth in three aspects: it possesses a claim to totality, wielded by knowledge; it possesses an ascending *eros,* which is realized in philosophical contemplation; and it seeks an all-embracing harmony or proportion of reality[235] . With Plato, the philosopher is now on God's side because he seeks a truth that is unconditioned. And if it is the just, then it is also the good. Thus, the object of the philosophical act is something real - a form, an essence - which is understood as participation, as irradiation of a certain light that is offered to the subject. Thus, philosophy begins with marveling at reality and this leads it to see reality as a *being,* albeit "pierced by nothingness"[236] . Finally, the Greek term *kalón,* deeper than the English beauty, "is what is just, appropriate, good, according to the essence, that in which the essence possesses its integrity, its health, its salvation"[237] . At this moment philosophical aesthetics is born, in its attempt to explain the glory of God.

Then comes *Religion*, understood as a synthesis between myth and philosophy. Here it was a task that could not be completed in Antiquity: the myth, in order to remain valid, needed a translating interpretation, through philosophy; but knowing that a purely philosophical religion was not possible; and that it was not possible to remain with the mere philosophical content of the myth, because that would dissolve the myth. So an attempt was made, in some cases, to project religion from philosophy, speaking of an all-encompassing *theion* (= divine) (Aristotle) or of a *syngeneia* (= affinity) between the human spirit and the divine (Stoicism)[238] . And in other cases, attempts were made to project religion onto philosophy, "thus establishing a gradation and tension in God" himself, between the creator and the divine supreme, or between divinity and good (gnosis)[239] . Despite their limitations, these attempts have been able to look squarely at the totality of reality, also with its frailties, and to seek a higher point of view. This section ends by recalling the two culminating figures of antiquity: Virgil and Plotinus. For the former,

man is mission and service in the midst of a nature-cosmos that is the universal presence of the divinity. And Plotinus expounds the lordship of the Absolute: that *One* that is not separated from everything else because it is the absolutely transcendent God and, at the same time, the absolutely immanent in all things (*Totally Other and Not-Other*). That presence and manifestation of the One in the space of the world - as epiphany- is the extreme essence of beauty. So much for ancient aesthetics.

The *Consequences,* subtitled *The Theological* A Priori *of the Philosophy of Beauty,* shows how the Christian event produces a completely new experience of divine glory. It begins with the Christian starting point, which is the Fathers of the Church, who, knowing that the ancient knowledge about God was already a theological knowledge, use the ancient concept of glory to give expression to the biblical-Christian concept of glory. The content is completely new, but it can well be expressed with the ancient notions. Thus, three traditional themes enter into the new Christian vision: the theme of the *exitus-reditus* (= departure and return) of the creature from God and toward God; the theme of *eros,* as the radical force of the finite creature in its dynamic of transcendence toward God, unity and original beauty; and the theme of the spiritual beauty of the creature, as the expression of a deeper and indestructible glory .[240]

He then takes a historical tour, from the early Middle Ages to Albert the Great, with the most relevant authors who developed, each in his own way, the three themes just mentioned. These authors gave their own Christian content and meaning to the ancient principle that all worldly beauty was an epiphany of divine glory, thus elaborating a synthesis between natural theology and biblical theology, but "not reflected to the core". The names of Boethius, Cassiodorus, Benedict, Gregory, Scotus Eriugena, the Victorians, the School of Chartres, Francis, Alexander, Albert and Ulrich appear. There one can appreciate - subtly - "how the ancient theological aesthetics (with its mythical *a priori* of revelation) is transformed, through the mediation of Christianity, into modern aesthetics" in its gradual transition towards philosophy . [241]

The volume culminates with St. Thomas. For Balthasar, the 13th century rediscovered the transcendental properties of being and, in particular, beauty. Thomas brings a new and very important light by studying the transcendentals under the determination of being (*esse*) and being in relation to essences. *Being* (*ens commune* or *esse*) is not God, nor is it the sum of all the entities of the world, but the first worldly reality derived from God in which all real beings participate. This is what has been called the "real distinction"[242] . Being is distinguished from God insofar as God subsists in himself, whereas being subsists only in finite entities. Being is the non-subsistent fullness and perfection of all reality and, therefore, the ultimate expression and similarity of the divine will. Therefore, God cannot be designated as the being of things, but is beyond all things, as Totally Other. This makes it possible to separate the glory of God from cosmic beauty. This is a true culminating moment of philosophy and metaphysics as aesthetics. Indeed, the entire sphere of essences is synthesized in an element that transcends them, which, therefore, can only be thought: being (with its transcendental beauty). Thus every relation between the essences is affirmed in their beauty, that is, in their relation to the being that gives them subsistence and harmony, which, not being subsistent in itself, ultimately indicates the Creator, from whom all the beauty of the world derives.

Vol. 5: In the space of metaphysics. Modern Age. Having shown the birth and development of a theological aesthetics (from the perspective of a metaphysics), he now asks, in a long and dense volume of almost 600 pages, "what has happened to the ancient and classical experience of the glory of God"[243] . Although it is not a history of philosophy, he develops in seven sections -with the presentation of a very erudite panel of authors- this historical process that goes from a metaphysics that used the cosmic categories of beauty as language for the revelation of God in Christ, to a metaphysics where the beautiful, stripped of the transcendental, has been reduced to worldly reality and where that which deserved to be called glory, has disappeared. He will call this whole part *Explanations*. *Aesthetics of transcendental reason.* In it, he will devote

more attention to two final moments, particularly to the "metaphysics of the spirit". And he will end with some important conclusions that justify his metaphysical position. There are seven moments - not necessarily chronological - in the sense of seven processes or aspects of a process that led to the loss of transcendental beauty. In this volume one can really perceive the deep philosophical synthesis that Balthasar has arrived at, and also his criticisms of the development described. Let us now look at the seven degrees or stages.

(1) *The crossroads* states that with Averroism a change begins. The more Christianity distinguished itself from the specifically philosophical, the more it had to have its own irreducible concept of glory. Breaking the Thomistic equilibrium of being, understood as the unlimited fullness of reality that comes from God but that has its subsistence only in the essences, then there are only two possible paths: either formalize being in a very universal rational concept (Duns Scotus, Suarez) and from there one arrives at modern scientific thought; or identify being with God (Eckhart) and from there one arrives at idealism. Both ways do not allow a properly theological aesthetics.

(2) The *Metaphysics of the saints* refers to the result of those spiritualities, from the 14th to the 17th century, which propose indifference or abandonment (*Gelassenheit*) in order to restore to God all that is God's (Taulero). It is the way of total availability to reach God (Ignatius), but also of becoming nothing in order to live perpetually at his disposal (Oratory). This spirituality makes a mistake by skipping - not always - the reality of the world.

(3) In *Madness and Glory* he reviews the literature, from the thirteenth to the nineteenth century, which draws from the metaphysics of the saints (and then develops) the image of the *madman*. One way of assuming holiness is to be mad for Christ. It is a form of availability since it is detached from everything conventional. It is a simplicity that can also be transformed into divine wisdom, even if it appears ridiculous to the world. In a way, it is a cry against the senselessness of human existence and a critique of a world that no longer shows almost anything divine. Otherwise, in the face of death

we will all be the same. Important are von Eschenbach, Erasmus, Cervantes, Grimmelhausen, Dostoyevsky. This metaphysics also "overlooked the reality of the world"[244] .

(4) With Humanism (15th century), and from then on, in the face of the loss of strength and credibility of the Church as mediator of divine glory, the gaze turns once again to the classical world as a place of unity. In this process, two ancient ideas come together: 1º In a world where the distinction between natural and supernatural was fragile, Christian revelation was understood as the supreme vertex of the universal relationship between God and man (Plato-Plotinus); 2º "The *speculative doctrine of God,* which arises from the immediate (Christian) experience between the infinite and the finite self" (Augustine, Eckhart). But, they are joined to a third decisive theme: evolution. Indeed, the world is now placed in "the inner space that unites the infinite self and the finite" and, since still at that historical moment the infinite self had primacy, then "the world and man [could] only [be] a search for themselves." "But with the inclusion of God in the process of the world his sovereign freedom over man was [lost] [and] man was speculatively [elevated] to the status of absolute criterion"[245] . Now, "at the starting point of this double theme - ancient mediation and speculation on the God-Spirit" appears - "as a kind of erratic block" - *The Knot. Nicholas of Cusa* (1401-1464), with his own doctrine on the *analogia entis.* For him, "God is all *in* all because he is inaccessibly all *above* all"[246] . God is *Not-Other* but founds and transcends every created entity. He also affirmed *the analogy of freedom,* which transferred negative theology to the field of God's gratuitous love, that is, to the impossibility of attaining his gratuitous love. Then "the pure gift of God will only be received when man also, in a free and personal way, decides for God, in a choice at the same time of God and of himself"[247] . A further step is taken towards idealism.

(5) In the *Ancient Mediation* he shows how the last centuries, from the Renaissance to the present day, have had to suffer the contradiction of uniting two opposing fields of force: 1º The "appeal for help to pagan religious antiquity in the face of a new foundation in

the primitive tradition". 2º "The reckless advance" of "the logicization of revelation in a speculative theology"[248] . But, neglecting the Christian key of the Antiquity - "where the depth of being as a whole has been archetypically opened"[249] -, it is no longer possible to identify the glory that mysteriously emanates from it. For this reason, Balthasar here makes a tour of *poetry,* from Ficino to Nietzsche and Rilke, passing through the English, German, French and Italian; since poetry, as a second theology or *ars divina* (= *divine* art), in its claim to beauty, love, the gratuitous, the holy, etc., laid bare the poverty into which theology was falling. He dwells particularly on Hölderlin and Goethe, the latter having emerged somewhat against the tide of the philosophy of the spirit, with his essential concept of *Gestalt* (= form): "nature is [...] the authentic locus of glory, which for him consists in the fact that the 'created form' reveals *in* itself the infinitely mysterious idea which, nevertheless - as one and only - always remains that divine which is above all apparent form"[250] . And he ends with the *resonance* that this metaphysics of ancient mediation produces in three directions: 1º Understanding the universal as a "biological cosmos" that can be given to us entirely. 2º By virtue of the identity of the micro and macro cosmos, to understand the universal cosmos as an inner cosmic space dominated by science and human art. Both paths will later be reflected in the theories of evolution. 3º To understand the universal, not as cosmos, nor as interiority, "but (with Heiddeger) as being, that being that had always been included in the ancient *physis* [= nature]"[251] . Indeed, for the latter, being, which emerges from the primordial background of every entity, is given - appears - in every existing thing. It is not a constitutive existent element of the entity, but something *completely other* with respect to every entity. Being indebted to Thomas, he does not accept, however, that non-subsistent being refers to an absolute subsistent -God-, thus falling into the necessity of the world and the metaphysics of identity. The conclusion of all this is that the recourse to Christian Antiquity did not work because it tried to embrace Christianity within it, and not rather - on the contrary - to understand that same Antiquity within the Christian faith.

(6) The most extensive section -which is where all this reflection points to- is dedicated to the *Metaphysics of the spirit.* Here he shows the path -alternative to ancient mediation- followed from Descartes to Marx, passing through all the great bastions of idealism (Spinoza, Leibniz, Malebranche, Kant, Schiller, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel). His interpretation is as follows: Since Eckhart thought of.

> to base everything resolutely on the personal relationship (opened by biblical revelation) between finite and infinite spirit, and to unfold the spirit, the free being that possesses itself as the substance, meaning and reason for all infra-spiritual or non-spiritual being. It was the Christian "degree of consciousness" expressing its own metaphysics, but no longer adhering to the pre-Christian metaphysics of nature as a lower foundational degree [...] The transfer of the accent to the personal-spiritual man-God relationship was, from a historical point of view, not only a progress (from "nature" to "spirit"), but also a regression .[252]

For Balthasar, with Descartes, "the center of metaphysics is transferred to the 'I think' from which he recovers the existence of both the finite spirit and the infinite," but this "leads to an inescapable identity: 'I think-I am' [which] is not a logical conclusion, but an immediate intuition" speculative. This introduces "the co-creative element of the finite subject , understood not only in the sense of a *secondary cause,* but also of its immediate insertion in the *Prima Causa,* of which it already possesses its intimate form". And, moreover,

> to balance this difference can and must serve the "process or becoming of the world", interpreted in such a way that in its "real" aspect it is understood as "evolution" of nature towards the spirit, while its "ideal" aspect as that which is already *a priori* projected by the same absolute (formal) spirit and through which the spirit reaches its totality of content (existential) . [253]

In these long pages he dwells on what he calls the *self-glorification of the spirit,* showing how Schiller initiates the course of idealism and that with Fichte, Schelling and Hegel "man is already thought of in the totality of the absolute as its center", thus ending the difference between nature and grace, since "the historical (biblical) revelation of God coincides with the revelation of being". Any analogy having been eliminated, all glory of being is self-glory of the spirit. The secretly sought identity has been reached. There is no longer any glory of God. "Being, God, is ultimately superseded"[254] .

(7) The seven aspects studied end with *Aesthetics as a science*. For Balthasar, all "'exact aesthetics,' which deals with the beautiful

accessible on the intramundane plane, captures only a fragment or an aspect of the total object"[255] ; but this does not prevent this fragment from containing some truth. Hence an exact aesthetics can contribute from three aspects, although in this *kairos* (= significant moment) of history they are no longer a great novelty: 1º The beautiful is an apparition - an epiphany - of the absolute (God)-spirit, which coincides with the human spirit. Thus aesthetics is transformed into a doctrine of harmony that explains why that which appears is really beautiful. 2º "If the phenomenon, the appearance of what does not appear, remains enigmatic"[256] , then artistic creation can be a way to understand what it can mean that, from an original intuition, a "form" emerges improvisedly. 3º The beautiful, as a miracle of grace that comes to meet us, will always remain a mystery that exact science cannot understand .[257]

He ends this dense and erudite volume with the result obtained in this journey: *Inheritance and Christian duty*. He divides it into two parts. He begins with *The place of glory in metaphysics.* In the face of that identification we have studied of "being" with the "necessity of being," where there is no longer any room left for wonder that something exists, nor then is there any room left for glory, Balthasar proposes to us to return to "wonder about being," not only as a "starting point" but as a "permanent element (ἀρχὴ) of thought." Thus he approaches "that miracle in four phases, with the indication of four differences, all of which reveal in the end what it is that truly deserves the name 'glory' in metaphysics"[258] : 1º Each of us exists in a precise place and time, but, at the same time, it is inexplicable that one should exist and equally inexplicable that anyone should begin to exist. 2º All entities participate in being (and do not exhaust it). But it is not the act of being (existing) as such, that to which the coming into existence of each of the essences is due. 3º The different "forms" of the entities are in the essences and not in the act of being. In other words, just as being does not have beings within itself, but lets them be, each in its own way, so all beings must let being be, so that its light can radiate everything. 4º If we recognize that neither being nor entity are subsistent in themselves, this necessarily refers to an extreme and

absolute freedom, to a third party, who is God. This is the *distinctio realis* (= real distinction) of Thomas. Thus, "the freedom of non-subsistent being with respect to all entities can only be guaranteed in its 'glory' if it is in turn grounded in a subsistent freedom of absolute being, which is God"[259] . The wonder of existence, or glory of being, presupposes a *freedom* that sustains it. This is the difference between God and the world that gives all its richness and, at the same time, its poverty to everything created. From these four differences we now conclude that, if biblical revelation "rests on the foundation of the radical God-man difference," then metaphysics, correspondingly, "is fulfilled in the event of revelation"[260] . Thus then, revelation can enter into the four said differences as the "'word' of being," which refers back to the source of all possibility .[261]

The second part, *Love keeps the glory,* draws the consequences of what has just been said. The four differences mentioned about the miracle of existence, applied to the human being, have no other explanation than having been loved. Someone wanted us to exist. Consequently, within the difference of being, the fundamental metaphysical act is *love.* Therefore, the Christian who philosophizes on the basis of faith, who reads real difference as the expression of a supreme love, must guard this metaphysical wonder with which philosophy begins and subsists. Each one must think his life and choose his metaphysics. "There is no such thing as a 'neutral' metaphysics"[262] . This is what these two very suggestive volumes were aiming at.

Vol. 6: Old Testament. It begins with an *Introduction to vols. 6 and 7,* where it describes its object: it deals here with the "divinity of God", with that which is proper and specific to God and which distinguishes him from all that is not God. This is called the *glory* of God, and refers to "God *as* God"[263] . That glory can be perceived only thanks to revelation, which is not born of some necessity on the part of God, but of his supreme freedom to pronounce a word that strikes and impacts man and puts him close to himself. Connected to this theme, he will also refer to the "creatural companion of God"[264] . God places before himself an image of himself, makes an alliance with it, thus revealing the contradiction between holiness and sin that introduces the whole

drama of the history of salvation. These two volumes, on the other hand, are not a simple continuation of the two previous ones (neither in the literary nor in the theological sense), because the revelation of God is not the last step of creation and history, but a free irruption of his sovereignty.

The volume on the *Old Testament* is divided into three sections that delimit the notion of glory and show its appearance in (Israel's) history. In *The Glory of God and Man, he* sets out the three fundamental concepts of biblical aesthetics: glory, image and alliance. (1) For there to have been revelation, the infinite being had to do what was unthinkable for man: to make himself known in that which exists as created. When a human being presents himself to another, "he creates around himself a magic circle that serves both to keep others away from his own sphere of life and to hold them in his power"[265] . With this we can understand what the Bible calls the *kabod* (*glory*) of God. It is the weight, the irradiation, the power of a being, which are at the same time its manifestation. The LXX translated this concept as *doxa,* which means the opinion that someone has about another and, therefore, his fame. All these elements come together in the concept of divine *glory*. (2) In the work of God's hands - the human being - the beautiful needs form and image to externalize "the splendor that transcends form and image"[266] . That the human being is the *image* of God means that, in some way, God is present in him, and that in some way he also represents him, thus acquiring a special relationship with him. (3) And, furthermore, all this revelation of God is *grace,* that is, the fact that man, the recipient of grace, has been able to gain access to the space of God and can reside next to God, is beyond any of his qualities and possibilities. Now, Israel unites these three concepts and concentrates its entire existence on giving glory to God and recognizing God as God.

Concepts are best understood in the concrete. That is why, in the second place, Balthasar shows *The Scale of Obedience* of the great Old Testament characters. Indeed, "only *history,* which manifests man's sin and brings God face to face with the reality of the transgression of the covenant, shows what the glory of God concretely is"[267] . Israel

possesses a totally exceptional idea of evil and sin, born precisely from the exceptionality of its idea of God. Hence every rejection of God's invitation in the Old Testament is described as infidelity. And since, throughout history, all human beings fail, then the history of the covenant will have to be the history of God with himself. That is what explains why the fundamental characteristic of Israel's founders and great prophets was *obedience*. The difference between God and man is characterized by obedience, since it is something that has to do with God himself. This is how the great founders acted: Abraham and Moses; the pre-exilic prophets; the three great ones: Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel; also Job and Deutero-Isaiah. In all of them, obedience becomes more and more radical and stripped down, awaiting the revelation of the New Testament, which will also explain it in its deepest core.

The third part is described as *The Long Twilight*. It deals with a problem -of very difficult solution- that Israel had to face: the people had been dispersed in the Babylonian exile and, for five centuries, not only salvation did not come, but the promises did not seem to have been fulfilled as expected. With that, moreover, "prophetism as a whole came to an end"[268] . It is, in truth, a "long twilight" that was broken only by Jesus, but which came about in a completely unexpected way. In reality, this twilight was necessary, precisely, so that the distance between the expected and Jesus would be made crystal clear . Now, on the one hand, this distance is a failure, insofar as it shows that the people "are not capable of making a synthesis between the idea of the covenant and its historical reality"; but, on the other hand, it is also an opening, because it prepares an individualizable historical figure, "who thus appears, above all, distinct and superior with respect to a present that cannot be conceived simply as the intrinsic future of that" figure who will arrive .[269]

Three aspects are important to understand this "twilight" period. In the first place (*Theologia gloriae*) (= Theology of glory), Judaism tried to see the glory of God by three ways, which in themselves did not fulfill their objective, but which prepared the New Testament: 1º In

the announcement of an immediate salvific event, in a historical-messianic form, but which was expected in vain. 2º By transferring salvation to above, in an apocalyptic form, which made this history irrelevant. 3º In a universal sapiential theology, deduced from the contemplation of creation and history, but which forgot the singularity of the history of Israel. Secondly (*Today without glory*), in the face of the lack of glory, Israel now has silence to meditate and ask itself why it has had to arrive at such an extremely critical situation. In a time -*kairos*- where the history of salvation seems to have come to an end, Israel saved the "consciousness [it possessed] of its election, of its uniqueness and of its universal mission"[270] , by resorting to two central factors: it put in writing the word of God, which thus kept the presence of Yahweh active in the present history of its people; and it elaborated a sacrificial liturgy, which included even blood, since by fulfilling what was commanded, it could keep alive its obedience and thus show its total availability before God's guidance. And thirdly (*Argumentum ex prophetia*) (= The argument from prophecy), the whole history of the covenant must be interpreted from its prophetic character. Without the Old Testament the New Testament cannot be understood, but only on condition that three criteria are accepted: (1) The singular forms of the Old Testament all remain open in their ultimate interpretation. (2) "In the fullness of time, the central point is occupied by One", who lives his mission not thinking of fulfilling what was announced, but acting with full sovereignty. (3) "In the subsequent interpretation of this center, we come, secondarily, to clarify that the center is confirmed as such center, insofar as the periphery crystallizes around it"[271] . In effect, Jesus is the passage from promise to fulfillment.

It ends with a very brief epilogue:

> In summary, we can define the content of the book as an answer to the following question: what path did the concept of *kabod Yahweh* have to take to be able to present itself in the New Testament, in Paul and John, as *doxa Christou* and *doxa Theou* [= glory of Christ and glory of God] [...] Only the biblical revelation as a whole conveys in a global way what God wanted to communicate to us of his glory .[272]

Vol. 7: New Testament. In the *Introduction* he offers the methodological criteria for this new volume: it is something like a

global look at the New Testament (not a theology of the NT), but from the key of the *glory of God,* where it is not a matter of studying a concept -which had already been depotentiated-, but of recognizing its new content in the person of Jesus, in the weight of his presence and authority, to then take up again the word glory, in John, with all its renewed meaning. Jesus is the absolute nucleus of the concept of glory in the New Testament, but it can only be perceived from faith and from its center, which is himself. Balthasar develops this theme from three aspects. First, in "*Verbum caro factum est*" (= The Word became flesh), he reviews the life of Jesus - especially from the Synoptics - to show how the glory of God is revealed in the incarnation, that is, in the life and work of Jesus. Now, in order to perceive well the glory in the life of Jesus, we must keep in mind the following elements. The Old Testament is and continues to be the theological and, for this very reason, epistemological introduction to the understanding of the New"; but in such a way that, although the Old Testament announces what will happen, it is not able to foresee how it will happen. Therefore, only "from its fulfillment in Christ is it possible to show retrospectively that it is precisely this form, and only this form" that corresponds to what it announced[273] . 2º Jesus is not, in the first place, the fulfillment of already existing premises but, on the contrary, he is essentially a perfectly new and unexpected reality. Hence, its understanding presupposes perceiving the articulating nucleus of its totality, which is, moreover, a gift of God. This presupposes that the ecclesial community is the recipient of this gift. 3º Since the truth of Christ can only be explained on the basis of faith, this necessarily presupposes an irreducible interpenetration between the event of Christ and its interpretation by the Church[274] . 4º Regarding the difficult subject of "time" in the New Testament, two criteria are important: the pre-Easter weight of Jesus' claim and authority "can only be explained by admitting that Jesus was conscious of being the last saving word of God to humanity"[275] ; and since what Jesus really *is,* is known only when all his actions (resurrection included) have culminated, then the point of view that explains everything in the New Testament can only be in the Church, which welcomes that

resurrection. 5º Jesus lived for the "hour" of his death, indeed, every instant of his life received its meaning from there (cf. John). Therefore, all that Balthasar affirms in these pages about the manifestation of the glory in the life of Jesus is only an introduction to this point: it is on the cross that we discover the profound meaning that the *kabod* has in the "New Testament as the weight of God"[276] . Moreover, the community understood that the fascination produced by Jesus (*kabod*), expressed in his absolute authority and united to his absolute poverty, could only be possible if it was interpreted from a Trinitarian background.

He then examines the concept of "glory" in the New Testament, in all its dimensions. He calls this part "*Vidimus gloriam eius*" (= we have seen his glory). First, he makes three preliminary considerations and gives the main thread of the New Testament concept. The three previous considerations: 1º If, on the human plane, glory is the environment that surrounds a person or how he is considered, that is, his fame, then applying this concept to God, "this consideration, this fame and its spiritual-sensible manifestation become the absolute majesty", revealed both in creation and in history[277] . 2º Just as "on the philosophical plane the 'beautiful' was presented as a transcendent property of being that crosses all entities, so now, on the theological plane, the element of magnificence-greatness-glory is shown as a property, necessarily superior to any categorical definition, of the foundation of being in every entity, that is, as a property of God"[278] . 3º Only in Jesus and in his absolute obedience is it manifested what the glory of God in his (good) truth really is. From the singular weight of this impressive fact, then, the divine majesty emerges as love and as the criterion of what glory must be. Indeed - explaining now the common thread - the essential element for understanding the real and deepest meaning of *doxa* in the New Testament is the Trinitarian obedience of the Son, manifested on the cross, but present as a "transcendental" in the whole life of Christ. Assuming these criteria, it can now define *the content of glory*: biblically, it means the "presence" of God in the world, but at the same time, his superiority as Lord of the world. By revealing himself, in his Word, he makes himself

accessible to others, he appears. But it is not simply an "image," a "manifestation," but the Father's own boundless love, which "appears" in the boundless obedience of the Son. But this epiphany requires a contemplator with faith, who allows himself to be transformed, assimilating himself to what he sees, that is, who allows himself to be justified and makes room for the action of God's justice. All in all, as we have already hinted, the essential point is that the *kabod* of Yahweh is made present in the cross of Christ, but only the weight, not the splendor, because the glory is manifested in the condition of the slave, in the senselessness of the cross. And this is also the way of life of Jesus, as greatness in concealment.

This third part, "*In laudem gloriae*" (= To the praise of his glory), is now about the glorification of the human being. We know that beauty-glory implies form and splendor and, therefore, theological aesthetics presupposes a doctrine of perception and a doctrine of rapture or ecstasy[279] . So, if we have just studied the perception of glory (in Jesus), now Balthasar reviews the ecstasy or rapture (in us) that produces the vision of the form in which the word of God that is given and understood comes to us. It is a question here of "the coming out of us by the force exerted on us by the call that comes to us, by the force of divine love that coming to us makes us capable of receiving it". This is the work of the Holy Spirit: to bring the human being to aesthetic rapture. He says it like this:

> This insertion is grace and is the work of the Holy Spirit, who makes the life of love spring forth not before us or upon us, but in us, thus making us capable of "glorifying" with our life the glory that has been given to us and that has become ours. Thus, this third part will be a book on the Holy Spirit and will deal with glorification .[280]

But it is necessary to understand well how the work of the Spirit is related to that of the Son. Two elements are key. 1º The function of the Holy Spirit extends beyond the visible form of Jesus, but in such a way that in the glorifying action of the Holy Spirit we cannot free ourselves from the past form (the life of Jesus), nor renounce its overcoming in the return of the Son to the Father (faith in the Risen One), if it is to be an authentic presence. 2º The Spirit transfers to us internally that which until now was external to us. This introduction is an interior knowledge and understanding, which also implies our

necessary collaboration. The Holy Spirit was sent to transform into a reality what until then was only a possibility. This is what it means that the "Spirit of truth" "will guide you into all truth" (Jn 14:17 and 16:13). Consequently, Balthasar here presents the action of the Holy Spirit in us (incorporating ourselves into Christ, transforming the heart, producing fruit), in community life (finding God in our brothers and sisters, solidarity, being Church) and in the eschatological hope of the journey towards the encounter with the God of glory.

Theodramatics

Vol. 1: Prolegomena. In this first introductory volume he exposes the value and usefulness of all the dramatic instruments (theater) to explain the action (= drama) in which the existential relationship of God with man, in Christ, consists. It consists of three parts. It begins with a long *Introduction. Determination of place,* which justifies this novel view of revelation under the prism of dramatic action - as a theory of movement - based on a couple of methodical considerations. In the first place, he affirms that, after the encounter with God, in aesthetics, there must necessarily follow a dialogue that implies a response and an action of the human being questioned. Indeed, our very existence is, in many ways, a drama, a movement. And revelation is also an action of God "in man, for man, and then also with man"[281] , simply to do him good. Secondly, he emphasizes that in contemporary theology new methodological approaches have been developed which, if we look at them properly in their positivity, converge precisely in what we call drama. These are: the object of theology as event; history as *kairos;* Christianity as *orthopraxis;* the biblical event as dialogue; the political character of the religious; theology as utopia; the use of the functional (= social dialogue) to understand the reality of the Church; the identity between person and role in contemporary psychology; and the new critical reflections on freedom and evil. As can be seen, all these themes are both theological and dramatic.

But, secondly, Balthasar also exposes the critical relationship that has traditionally and historically existed between theology/Church and drama/theater. Indeed, in the field of theology, in addition to the

usual consideration that dramatic instruments are inappropriate for doing theology, Hegel criticized the core of the question, stating that the foundation of the whole dramatic dimension is in the duality between the human and the divine, which precisely has been overcome by Christianity in the human-divine identity as an absolute point, with which existence lost its dramaticity[282] . Moreover, historically, the Church has had a conflictive relationship with the theater, criticizing it in Antiquity for its brutality, and later, reproaching it for its impiety and the social and religious criticism to which it subjects the established hierarchical and secular structures. However, for Balthasar, that same history has shown the possibilities of the theater: the liturgy has expressed a special dramatic quality, making *present* the *action* of God with man; the "sacramental" representations of the Middle Ages are a classic of evangelization; and the critical function of the theater has always been healthy for the Church and society.

The second part presents the *Dramatic Instrumental.* It begins with a long and impressive historical journey through innumerable Western works and authors, from Homer to the 20th century, which develop that tradition that transmits a conception of the world that resembles a theater. From all this erudite journey, he concludes that "the *topos* 'theater of the world'"[283] contains elements that, from its dramatic ingredients, possess an important capacity to give a religious and theological interpretation to human existence. The theater, more than an image, is a symbol or a mirror of the world, which makes explicit that dramatic element and reflection on itself that existence possesses. He then describes five *elements of the dramatic* that confirm this. (1) Not only does the theater illuminate existence, but also, through the theater, the human being hopes to be able to express something relative to the mystery of existence. To this end, it brings to light the harmony between the structure of theater and the structure of existence, the synthesis of which is reflected in the actor, who is the instituted relationship between vital reality and aesthetic reality. (2) Theatrical production is composed of the triad of author, actor and director. The first is identified with God, the Father, author of the

work of creation. The actor -Christ and us in him- is the one who must represent an action, making his own the plot received as a commission. To do this, he must be both faithful to the author and original and authentic, from himself, in the representation. The director must update and coordinate the play, obeying the poet, but leaving the artists free to express their own feelings. (3) The dramatic realization is composed of another triad: the performance, the audience and the horizon, in intimate communion with each other. The play has been written to be performed to a spectator who will never be passive, but who expects a certain "revelation" in it. The audience will welcome the play if it recognizes in it a projection of itself on a definitively valid and superior plane. Indeed, the dramatic action is always written within an indelimitable horizon of meaning that the author shares with the audience. (4) The drama, in its temporal and spatial finitude in which, however, it must reach significant and permanent conclusions; it makes visible in symbolic form the deepest meaning of human finitude, which is also traversed by an element of vertical infinity and definitive meaning. This reaches its climax with the representation of death. (5) The drama "is constitutively a human action", that is to say, "action as a project of meaning of existence that tries to be realized"[284] and, at the same time, a search for the good in the midst of the ambivalence of the daily situation. With this, he reveals that human action is under an ultimate light that judges it, but that this judgment cannot be made by ourselves.

It culminates with what he considers the central contribution of drama to theology: the role of the actor. He begins this section, which he has called *Transition: from role to mission,* by posing the basic philosophical - existential and human - problem: every human being experiences a fundamental dualism between what he represents (as a task, place or mission in life) and what he really is[285] . This dualism is prolonged in the fact that each person can become "himself" only through things other than himself: character, other people, etc. And, also, in the realization that, in order to respond to the problem of one's own existence, although there is no other way than the singular

person himself, nevertheless, that singular person has as his obligatory mediator action (Blondel), only through which he comes into contact with the universal. This is the fundamental problem of any philosophy of the subject[286] . Here, then, the importance of this dramatic instrumentality became clear: it allows us to reflect in depth on this constitutive relationship between being and action, between person and role, and, with that, to attempt an answer to the fundamental question of *who I am.* Indeed, every person is "alone" with his destiny and, in this solitude, he necessarily asks himself this fundamental question.

After having raised this important question, Balthasar develops his own reflection on the place of "role" in the existence and development of the human being. He does so in two moments. First, he provides some answers that have been unsatisfactory throughout history. Modern psychology and sociology, each under its own perspective, have read the "role" of the individual in the world as a *delimitation* that, for different reasons, shows a certain lack of freedom or true autonomy in the human being. For their part, Stoicism and, in particular, idealism, see it as an *alienation,* since, in its offering of totality, the individual self is not assumed as such, but decays into being only a moment of the absolute process. In contrast, other attempts at mediation have achieved a much better result, in particular those authors who speak of the "dialogical principle"[287] , where the true answer to the question of who I am, in the end, is given only by the vertical key of biblical revelation, since God does not look only at a mere "generic individual" of the species, but at a person, unique, unrepeatable and singular[288] . Thus Balthasar arrives at his goal:

> The direction of the path was marked by the question "who am I?"; it was necessary to get out of the arbitrary character of the "role" deposited as a casual garment on the back of a colorless self, at any moment interchangeable for another; and this to reach a "self" that does not admit exchange and that is therefore qualified as the bearer of a truly dramatic role in the field not of the theater, but of existence .[289]

For Balthasar, only with a proper, unique and unrepeatable name can a theodramatic of existence be given, since, otherwise, the necessary *partner* for the unique and unrepeatable God is missing. And this has

been found only in the field of biblical theology .[290]

Vol. 2: The persons of the drama. Man in God. It begins with a brief *Prologue,* which makes the leap from the prolegomena - of a "predominantly literary" character - to what is properly a theodrama, that is, to contemplate "the dramatic character of existence in the light of biblical revelation"[291] . Two theological principles will govern the four volumes to come: (1) The concepts of God and the world will be developed from the drama already staged and of which we are co-authors; (2) Action will be what will reveal what the singulars really are, first of all, God himself who has revealed himself in history, as well as then the human being, who is known only from how he has existed in history, since *esse sequitur agere* (= being is a consequence of [and is shown by] acting)[292] . This volume is then divided into two large sections: the presuppositions and the persons of the drama.

In the *Presuppositions*, he sets out five. First, the passage from theological to theodramatic aesthetics occurs in the openness or closedness that every person must decide in the face of the manifestation of being in the *form* that strikes him with its light and tells him that it is him, and only him, whom it is calling. Secondly, the "truly human form," which develops in the course of life, "is not something that is previously given, but is built up by free decisions," but which acquires a truly universal and definitive character only within the drama of Christ[293] . Third: "The drama described in the Bible is God's initiative, and so between the human existential project and it there is no solution of continuity, but a leap"[294] . But since creation was created with a view to salvific grace, then, on the one hand, nothing human is lost in the drama that God unfolds together with man and, on the other hand, human drama itself will also help us to understand the divine drama, which has its normative center in the form of Christ, comprehensible only through faith. The fourth presupposition, *theodramatic hermeneutics*, is more extensive and refers to the fact that if revelation is an explanation of God, then it, like theology, is simply a hermeneutic, developed on the basis of certain methodical principles described therein (necessary transposition of horizons, importance of Scripture, totality in Christ, place of faith).

And finally, the fifth presupposition is the fact that theology is not only alongside the drama, explaining its meaning, but is an internal aspect of the drama itself and must, therefore, be understood within it.

The second section -the persons of the drama- is actually expounded in this and the following volume. Here he develops the *Dramatis personae (I),* which refers to the human being as such. This is his theological anthropology, deployed in the light of three perspectives. The first, *The scenic framework: heavens and earth,* shows, respectively, the place from where God acts and the place where the human being dwells, which, therefore, constitute the scene where the drama unfolds. But here it is important to keep in mind that "it is proper to theodrama" that the place where it unfolds - "its scenic frame" - is not a "neutral stage on which any tragic or comic action can be played out, but that its scene has been sketched for the unique drama to be played out on it and that it is determined by the action that is to unfold"[295] . Every drama has its own stage, so the human drama has "the heavens and the earth".

The second perspective, *Infinite Freedom and Finite Freedom,* is the core of the volume and, perhaps, of the entire *Theodramatica.* Written in his characteristic way -reviewing the historical development of ideas and concepts-, he exposes in six questions the thorny issue of the relationship that can occur between God (infinite) and the human being (finite), so that there is indeed a *drama* in the game of freedoms. (a) First, he delimits the subject: it is a matter of resolving "the biblical paradox that God can be 'everything' (Sir 43:27) and yet man is 'something', that God can be absolutely free without man's authentic freedom being abducted, and that God shows his omnipotence precisely by communicating to his creatures an authentic identity"[296] . (b) Next, he shows how only biblical-trinitarian thought resolved the possibility of a coexistence and alliance between finite and infinite freedom, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in the heart of each man and who allows the two to work together without the one disappearing into the other. (c) Thirdly, he defines finite freedom based on two pillars: 1st freedom as *self-dynamism*, that is, the power to move spiritually to oneself, to be the cause of one's own will and

choice and to be master of one's own decisions, which makes it a true image of the infinite being; 2nd and freedom as *assent*, that is, that the capacity to move by oneself towards the other is determined by the perception of being (= the and the other) as good and, therefore, is always a search for the good. (d) He now continues with infinite freedom, that of God. Its authentic understanding can only be biblical. In God his self-possession and self-availability coincide with his Trinitarian self-giving, which makes possible the existence of finite freedom, by withdrawing into a certain latent state and assuming a certain unknowable way of being, which lets the other be and exist, just as in the Trinity the Father lets the Son be. (e) The fifth question refers to the acceptance of freedom on the part of the human being, which "cannot be made possible except through infinite freedom and, consequently, neither can it be realized as finite freedom except in infinite freedom"[297] . (f) He ends with the theme of grace, which is the vital nexus or relationship between finite and infinite freedom, which must be understood as "the immanence of God in" finite freedom, "as grace," but not as "something alien (*alienum*), simply because God himself cannot be an alien (*aliud*), since everything that is relative and created becomes aware of itself within the framework of the absolute," through "his perfect surrender as a creature"[298] .

The third perspective studies that which is perdurable and immutable in *man, that* is, his essence. It understands it as mystery, polarity and image. First of all, its irreducible character of mystery must be reaffirmed. Then, "pre-Christianly", it has been defined on the basis of three essential constants: "spirit and body, man and woman, individual and community". In these three dimensions the human being "appears constituted in polarity, forced to pass constantly from one pole to the other, in order to seek each time in the other pole its complement and its peace, so as to be able to refer beyond its entire polar structure"[299] . And with the irruption of biblical revelation, the decisive aspect of the human being has become his likeness to God, which makes him a reflection of uncreated freedom. And with this, the polarities just mentioned have been radicalized and "overcome," since they are now viewed from the perspective of the Trinity, the original

archetype of the unity of essence and distinction of personal relationships. However, throughout history there have also been "unmeasured" versions[300] of what a human person can be.

Vol. 3: The persons of the drama. Man in Christ. He introduces the volume by affirming that what is decisive is born of the Christology of the New Testament. Christ is the protagonist of the drama and we are "characters in Christ". Therefore, a theory on man reaches its fullness only in the light of the *concretissimum* (= the Word made flesh) that guarantees man a new freedom to take a stand before God[301] . In these *Dramatis personae (II)* he will then deal with Christ and the other characters of the drama, who are always seen only *in* Christ. The first -briefer- theme is *The place of Christ in the theodrama:* with the coming of Christ, a primordial fact in history has occurred, which is without turning back, and which places him at the very center of history. That is, "in Christ, God has opened that personal space of freedom within which the concrete characters (individual or collective) receive their definitive face, mission or human 'role'", so that each one can live it in a personal way .[302]

He then develops a *Christology in perspective*, indicating the adequate method and the essential content of any Christology that wants to be elaborated. In *The Problem of Method* he proposes four fundamental methodical criteria: 1º Despite the importance and indispensable use of historical-critical methods, Christology is essentially based on the *ellipsis* or "correlation between the epiphany of God and the 'eyes of faith'"[303] . 2º In the interpretation of Christ, the *diastasis* between a supposedly exact historical science and history as interpretation from the present must be overcome[304] . Both aspects possess an intrinsic unity. Christology, already from biblical times, was formulated in "a [permanent] confrontation between dogmatic Christology and biblical eschatology"[305] , that is, the claim of Jesus was interpreted dogmatically already from the biblical period itself. 4º The New Testament is structured on the basis of the law of thematic transpositions. This means: since "in each historical phase of the revelation of God in Jesus the whole Word of God is present", then, since the whole is present in each part, it is legitimate to transfer to

the things lived by Jesus, the facts, words and interpretations deduced from the totality .[306]

The second aspect of his *Christology in perspective* is the essential content to be given, and he defines it as the fundamental unity of *Mission and the person of Christ.* In a hundred or so dense pages, he assumes "the concept of mission as a hermeneutical thread" to describe the person of Jesus in the New Testament. The New Testament notion of mission arises from the "eschatological and universal mission consciousness in Jesus", which assumes that his mission-sending is absolutely unique and that, therefore, when his person is described, in reality his function is being described[307] . Hence the full and unique identity of person and mission, an identity that is given only in Jesus. Now, this concept is perfectly compatible with a fully human conscience in Jesus, which awakens, develops and grows from the historical mediation, since it allows him, from the beginning, to live a human life and mission from his relationship with the Father. On the other hand, it also allows us to understand the very complex subject of his being a *divine* person, since "being a person" (is understood as) and can be assured only by God who "tells a spiritual subject who this is for him, the faithful and truthful God, and where in the same movement he tells him why he exists (since he assigns him a mission accredited by God), there it can be said of a spiritual subject that he is a person". Well, this is what "has already happened, in an archetypal way, in Jesus Christ"[308] . Finally, he shows how from here the New Testament was able to deduce, without problems, both the preexistence of Jesus and his universal soteriological function.

The third part of the volume deals with *Theological Characters.* The fundamental argument states that "in the scenic framework opened by Christ, the created subjects [-Chosen *and sent*-] can participate in the theodrama by becoming theologically relevant characters"[309] . But, given that the spiritual subject does not possess an identity between the eternal election and the temporal call (as it does in Christ), all his historical action consists in working so that this non-identity becomes an identity as similar as possible and thus find, in this mission, the true personal and social identity, by participating in the universal

mission of Christ[310] . Under this theological concept, she is currently developing *The Woman's Response,* which is a Mariology and an ecclesiology deeply intertwined with each other. From a "theology of the sexes" derived from Adrienne von Speyr[311] , she first reflects on the theological significance of the male-female relationship, as a prolegomena for a Mariology and an ecclesiology. He then presents a synthesis - also with critical elements - of the historical development of Mariology; he then dwells on Mary herself, as a dramatic character due to the triple tension that accompanies her: by participating in "a paradisiacal existence (supralapsarian) and an existence in the fallen state"[312] ; by her existence as a carnal mother and virginal mother; and, most strongly, by her present presence in eschatological tension "between time and eternity"[313] . And the woman's response culminates with the Church's response, as a *partner* of Christ, who is already incoatively present in Mary. Here the Church is also traversed by an internal drama that is that of being the Bride and, at the same time, an institution. He then dwells for a moment on the *Church of Jews and pagans,* dealing with two always difficult themes: (1) the place of Israel in the history of salvation starting from its "no" to Christ; (2) the fact that pagan peoples, like peoples, do not have a theological personality properly speaking[314] , beyond the unity they acquire in the Church of Christ, which biblically has been called the "time of patience" and the universal salvific will of God[315] . And he develops an ecclesiological synthesis based on the following four concepts: mystery, sacrament, transcendence, and divided Church. He briefly concludes this third part with a reflection on *The Individual, that* is, on the uniqueness of the Christian as such, who belongs to a community of followers in uniqueness; and in whom the whole ecclesial being resides in his own being. Indeed, although he may be alone in the world, he is always a presence of the Church in that place, he is a martyr, and even, at times, abandoned by the Church.

The fourth part deals with the "darkest field of our subject": *angels and demons.* "One can neither deny nor trivialize their existence, much less succumb to their fascination"[316] . They are mysterious characters, but they have been depotentiated in the New Testament and their

place in the drama is rather marginal. What they really are can only have a theological, not a speculative, answer. Angels are certainly theological characters, while demons are doubtful. In any case, man's freedom is directly before God -which excludes any intermediate plane-, where the only central character is Christ.

It ends with "*Deus Trinitas*" (= God the Trinity). It cannot be forgotten that at the center of the drama is God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But how does God act in the world? Through Christ and the Holy Spirit, so that the economic Trinity is a translation of the immanent Trinity. However, since the immanent Trinity is the background of the economic Trinity, it cannot be simply identified with the economic Trinity[317] . Hence two conclusions: the way in which the Trinitarian persons act in the economy manifests what they are in immanence and from this a Trinitarian theology is deduced. And, on the other hand, the Trinity can act in the drama -precisely- because the created reality possesses traces of the Trinity, in such a way that even the triads of which we have spoken in the prolegomena can also become an image of the Trinity.

Vol. 4: The Action. As its title indicates, this volume deals with the work accomplished by Jesus, but concentrating on the passion and resurrection of the slain lamb, since his glory is only manifested in its true depth in his struggle, "his defeat" and his victory[318] . The main argument will be soteriology (with the concept of "vicarious redemption")[319] , as well as a theology of history. He divides it into four themes, the first two of which are still introductory. It begins *under the sign of the Apocalypse* because this book shows that the action of human freedom is intrinsically articulated within the broader - and present - action of the slain lamb. This last book of the Bible presents us with a superior vision, given by God, as a sum of all history, where the event of Christ is the eminent center that gives it meaning and leads it in its totality. The drama of all men unfolds within this drama that is always *in crescendo* in its struggle between good and evil, but which, on the other hand, is also assured of its final victory .[320]

The second introductory theme is to show the *pathetic scenario of the world.* Indeed, the Apocalypse reveals that the essential history of the

human being runs on the vertical axis between heaven and earth and, moreover, indicates that this is the direction that gives meaning to that same history. But, on the other hand, although the human being experiences in himself his claim to the absolute, since he cannot find this absolute in the face of time and death, his life becomes "pathetic" (= suffering). Hence the human being has to live his existence on the basis of three aporias. But they also have their element of positivity in the fact that they have already been destroyed/overcome by being brought to their maximum significance by the slain lamb: 1º He lives in time, in which he finds meaning and seeks personal development, but he encounters death which, although it is normal, is also unique and pathetic for each one of us. 2º Freedom is the most sacred thing one possesses, but due to its capacity-possibility to do evil, it can also be designated as evil. 3º The quality of self-decision, as power, gives certain ambivalence to freedom and makes evil emerge as guilt and maximum dramaticity in human life. It is in this pathetic scenario of the world that the saving *pathos* (= passion) of Christ appears.

In the third theme, *Action in the Pathos of God, he* develops, in more than two hundred pages, his profound and personal soteriological vision. He presents it from three points of view. First, *The time of God's long patience,* where a distinction must be made between the situation of Israel and the rest of humanity. Israel lives in the midst of an *in crescendo* of sin and judgment, but is moving towards the future incarnation. On the other hand, in the pre-Christian religions, although they contained *Logoi spermatikoi* (= seeds of the Word), there is no undercurrent that brings them closer to Christ, nor a kind of "transcendental Christology"[321] , since the point of integration is only verified with the coming of Christ. He then presents, at length, *soteriology through history,* from Scripture to the present day. With regard to the New Testament, he states that "the whole dynamic of the Gospels [...] arises from the diastasis in the 'life of Jesus', which encloses an internal tendency to the 'hour', as yet unknown, but which nevertheless decides everything"[322] . And he adds that New Testament soteriology developed five interrelated aspects: (1) God reconciles the world through his Son who gives himself "for us" (2) in a true

exchange of place; which produces as fruit in us, both (3) liberation from sin, and (4) introduction into intra-Trinitarian life; and, all that (5) as fruit of God's merciful love[323] . With respect to the models throughout history, he develops the patristic model of the "exchange of place", the medieval model of "satisfaction", and the models of the Modern Age that fundamentally speak of "solidarity" or, in another approximation, of "substitution". And, thirdly, he sets out his own vision, based on the idea of *vicarious substitution*. His attempt is to present a theological explanation of the saving event that manages to integrate the five biblical motifs just mentioned. Four major ideas run through his proposal: 1º The event of the Cross is based on a Trinitarian event, previous and eternal, which is the self-expropriation and *kenosis* of the Father in the generation of the Son. 2º The culminating point of the drama is the abandonment of the Father to the Son on the cross, who assumes in himself the "no" of the creation to the Father, as he also receives the respective "veterostestamental wrath of God"[324] , attracting with that the substituted ones to the intimate attitude of the crucified Son. The resurrection reverses the situation of Christ, who now grafts us into his destiny by communicating to us the Holy Spirit, who grants us the divine filiation that enables us to follow him. 4º All humanity is included in this "for us"[325] , which brings to fullness the natural solidarity of man and makes him participate even in his condition of intercessor.

The last theme is *The Battle of the Logos,* which attempts a Christological theology of history. There he denies the possibility of a periodization (ethical or religious) of the history of the world after Christ, since it is not possible to speak of progress or regression, but only of a Christological "battle"[326] . He justifies this important affirmation in three theological criteria: 1º Before Jesus there is no possible neutrality: "he who is not with me is against me" (Mt 12:30). 2º The Church, one and holy, is also made up of sinners, its members being outside of it and its enemies within it. 3º The world in its origin and in its goal transcends itself towards the Logos, but this does not necessarily mean that there is a linear (positive) development of history .[327]

Vol. 5: The last act. The last volume of the *Theodramatica* "is Trinitarian", because history converges in the Trinitarian life. And for this reason it is also eschatological, since we live from this theological hope. This volume has, in addition, the characteristic that "phrases taken from works of Adrienne von Speyr have been frequently quoted", as a testimony of "the basic coincidence between her conceptions" and those of Balthasar[328] . In this volume we find several of the ideas most cherished and cherished by both of them. The *Introduction* sets out his *concept of Christian eschatology*, which is based on two principles: (1) With the resurrection of Christ, the eschatological has assumed a completely *Christological* form, both as content and as interpretation of every eschatological statement. (2) Christians (and humanity) have been co-determined by the destiny of Jesus. Hence the true *esjaton* (= final) is the Trinity and the ultimate reason for the drama is the growing *no* of the world in the face of the growing *yes* of God[329] . The volume is structured in the manner of a triptych, where the two external tables (the first and the third part) show how God embraces the world that culminates its history with the actions that take place in the final encounter of man with God, described in the middle table (second part).

In the first part, entitled *The World from God, he* develops two novel perspectives. First, starting from the scholastic axiom that creation is a reflection of the Trinity, in the sense that only a Trinitarian God can really create something (and not emanate it by necessity), he deduces that creation itself then refers back to the Trinitarian reality. This means, concretely, that everything *positive* that we find in this world must have an eternal and absolute correlate in the Trinity, which is its creative source. Balthasar makes this explicit with the following facts: human becoming, which is good because it allows us to exist, reflects the eternal and marvelous vital happening of God; if in order to love I need the presence of another to whom to give myself, God is sublime love in his eternal self-giving-generation of the Son; if it is good to let others do and give time and space for them to develop, in God each person eternally lets others be and do in the perfection of their existence. With this it is understood that God is essentially love, and

that the creation of the world is a possible and free act in a God who needs nothing and no one. The second perspective studies the aforementioned polarity of heaven and earth, affirming two fundamental things. 1º Heaven and earth are in a dramatic relationship, where heaven has priority because it is the transcendence of earth. Now, this polarity is fulfilled and has its full content in Christ, the Word of God come into the world. 2º This incarnation gives humanity a *theological* hope. Primarily a vertical hope, insofar as it is founded on Christ who is now at the Father's side; but also a horizontal hope, forward, although not necessarily world-historical, but toward the beyond, participating in the mission of Christ.

The second part -the most extensive- reflects on three great *aspects of the last act of the drama,* in which the themes of traditional eschatology are included. The first aspect is the *tragic elements* that this final act has, since it implies the impressive aporia that the human person, created for God, can reject his definitive embrace; and that God, who has given himself entirely for the salvation of the human being, can pronounce a definitive judgment of condemnation on that same human being. This is what obliges Balthasar to deepen his reflection as far as he is allowed to do so. On this particular theme, the biblical reality of judgment and of the *mysterium iniquitatis* (= mystery of iniquity) allow him to speak "at least [in an] analogous sense, of an eschatological tragedy, insofar as one can or must speak of a partial failure of God's universal plan, of a partial meaninglessness of his creation"[330] . And without rejecting the traditional immutability of God, he also speaks of a "pain of God [...] as unfathomable as his love"[331] .

The second aspect is the final act, now, as a *Trinitarian drama.* It proposes a deeper understanding of four themes that, without skipping dogmatic teaching, can be thought of more *courageously* from the infinite love of God[332] : (1) God created the world, not "outside," but within his own divine life, so that the incarnation, passion and death of the Son reveal what is also happening within the Trinity. (2) One cannot simply speak of universal redemption, but it is necessary to recognize a complete asymmetry between the judgment and mercy of

God, while always respecting the freedom of man in his ultimate decision with respect to God. (3) One cannot deny the existence of judgment (= man's self-judgment) on the part of God. It would be unworthy of man himself. But we must not forget that the eternal Judge has also been the universal Savior and that judgment never has the last word. (4) A definitive self-choice of separation from God would be hell and that exists in the damned. But if the Son descended to that infernal depth and met him (where the condemned could appreciate that *he is there for him*), would it not be conceivable that in hell there would remain, "as what is definitively condemned by God", only "sin separated from the sinner through the work of the cross, a reality not null thanks to the force invested in it by man"? Forgiveness would in that case be the *separation of* sin from us, and that useless remainder would then be hell . [333]

And the third aspect refers to those two central moments of the moment of the human being's definitive encounter with God: death and judgment. The title is decisive of its content: *The Human Being in the Uplifting Embrace* (*Der Mensch in der Unterfassung*), that is, God embraces, protects and shelters the human being through death and judgment. Death, as "the most specific possibility of existence" (Heidegger)[334] , through the death of Christ is transformed into a birth; and the judgment (as a unique moment) purifies the one who is embraced, who from then on can live only from the donation - in that sheltering embrace - of a totally undeserved and gratuitous existence.

The third part deals with *The World in God, that* is, with eternal acceptance in the Trinitarian life. It offers two great theological affirmations. In the first place, this acceptance is, in reality, a profound transformation of the human being and of the whole of creation. But a transformation that does not pantheistically absorb the created reality, precisely because it has been created in the Trinity. In fact, Balthasar had affirmed that the trinitarily conceived God pre-contains the created positivity and, therefore, can make it come out of himself and then gather it up without harming it[335] . On the other hand, this original and final relationship with God is present in the world as an entelechy that makes it always walk towards this

encounter and this definitive life in the Trinity. The second thing is to understand well what eternity is all about. The central thing is to understand it, above all, as *participation* in the intra-trinitarian life. Balthasar explains this with various concepts used in the theological-spiritual tradition, whose fundamental idea is that not only does the Trinity dwell in us, but that we also participate in the relations of the same divine persons, that is, we are re-begotten by the Father, and as sons in the Son, in our gratitude to the Father, in the Son we co-expire the Spirit, thus participating eternally in the same process of God's love. He concludes by affirming that, despite all that we have been able to reflect on, none of this can take away from God the unfathomable character of mystery that he is and always will be.

He concludes the entire *Theodramática* with the following question: if the economy affects God, then we can ask: what happens to God when man exists, "what does God lose if he loses man?"[336] , "what does God get from the world?" :[337]

> An added gift that the Father makes to the Son, but equally the Son to the Father and the Holy Spirit to both, a gift because the world receives an inner participation in the exchange of divine life through the diverse operation of each of the three persons, and therefore restores to God what it has received from God as divine together with the gift of its own creaturely condition also as a divine gift .[338]

Theological

Vol. 1: Truth of the world. He begins with two introductions, one on *Theology* in general and the other on this first volume. Regarding the first, he reviews his *Insertion into the complete work* of the *Trilogy,* recalling that "it is devoted to theological 'logic,' that is, [... it] asks: what does 'truth' mean in the event of God's revelation through the incarnation of the Logos and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit?"[339] . This presupposes an ontological basis in the being of the world so that divine truth can be represented within the structures of created truth. The *Introduction to* the volume indicates the content that will be studied in this first volume of the *Theology.* It is that, recognizing the existence of truth as a datum, in fact, primordial-as a property of knowledge, but also as a transcendental determination of being-we must then unravel its essence. Both its essence and its scope are

unlimited (like being itself), and for this reason it must be described from four great doors of access or aspects of truth.

It begins with *Truth as Nature,* which deals with the evidence of truth, the knowledge of which always implies a relation between the cognizing subject and the known object. Indeed, "every man who awakens to consciousness not only knows the concept of truth and understands it; he also knows that truth really exists. Truth has the same degree of evidence as existence"[340] . "Therefore, in a first description, truth can be defined as the unveiled, uncovered, open, unconcealed (ἀ-λήθεια) state of being"[341] . But the unveiling, as a property of being, is always realized to a consciousness that, in turn, trusts that which appears to it and, therefore, allows itself to be measured by that object, is adequate to it. Therefore, truth is also "fidelity, constancy, reliability". It can be trusted. On the other hand, in this unveiling, subject and object participate. The subject, because in his self-consciousness, when he recognizes something as something that is, he understands at the same time what the being in general is. And the object, because it is cognizable in itself, which means that it is not only measurable, but is already measured, in the sense that "the measure of the object must exist in the infinite subject, in God"[342] . Now knowledge, which is always an encounter between subject and object, for both has the character of something unexpected, of a gift. Thus, objects need a subjective space where they can be unveiled and find their full meaning; and the subject knows himself only through the world that is constituted and fulfilled in him from the unveiling of being. Finally, the subject offers a space to the object, a space that is not a simple "tabula rasa", but that gives it meaning from its being spirit and endowed with sensibility.

The second aspect is *Truth as freedom.* "Truth, in the full sense, is only given in a cognizing act of the spirit. But the spirit, as spirit, is free, because it is being for itself. That is why truth necessarily enters the sphere of freedom." In the first place, there is a freedom in the object itself since, for a being, to be known by another is not simply indifferent, because that means "to be represented and impressed in another spirit"[343] . Therefore, every being has, in its autonomy and

singularity, a degree of intimacy that counterbalances knowledge (in varying degrees, from an inanimate being to a spirit). This means that the object does not allow itself to be completely trapped by the received meaning and in its unveiling remains likewise veiled in its unveiling. But the subject also possesses freedom in knowledge. Although he must obviously orient himself according to the law of the object and cannot "think as he wishes"[344] about what is being unveiled to him, he nevertheless has the freedom to turn cognitively towards the things he wishes to know, to order them according to his own *ratio* and to accept them in his personal totality and in the totality of reality. This means, in short, that he is moved by the desire-love to turn, from himself, towards what he desires. And all this is essentially freedom.

The third aspect, the most extensive, is *Truth as mystery,* since "the knowledge of a truth will not annul its mysterious character, but, on the contrary, will precisely bring it to light"[345] . He bases this medullar notion of truth on three ideas that explain this character of truth. First, the fact that "the first point of contact between object and subject are the images that appear"[346] , but things are more than the image, they are an *essence* that appears. Here is the first "mysterious" aspect[347] of truth: the irreducible polarity between being and appearing (*being* appears, *being* appears, being *appears*), between essence and manifestation, where each being can only express itself through its own language, which is, at the same time, the only possibility for a manifestation *and* the ultimate reason for its concealment, because each being is more than what can be expressed in the conventionality of a language. Secondly, "the fact that truth always appears to us in the mode of the situation"[348] , which makes it unique and unrepeatable. Indeed, each essence (that which "is" something) is particularized in a constellation of its own elements, in a particular existence, in a particular time and space; characteristics that make it in such an inscrutable way, that only the absolute being can know it in its most authentic truth. The truth of each being is unfathomable. From the above it can be concluded -thirdly- that, although truth is the "non-hidden of being"[349] -since it is unveiled in

the phenomenon and is thus legible-, this unveiling is always limited. Therefore, all unveiling is so insofar as it is veiled, which means that its character of mystery is an essential part of the very preciousness of being. And "only such a being is ultimately bearable for knowledge. Only a being endowed with mystery is ultimately worthy of love"[350] .

And the fourth door of access is *Truth as participation,* which studies the relation between divine and worldly truth, which was otherwise implicit in the three previous aspects. This relation unfolds under four conditions/characteristics: 1º Given that consciousness knows itself to the same extent that it opens itself to being in general, then if in that opening the finite being can discover finite truth, this is possible only on the foundation of a free expressive and creative action of God, who communicates to creation something of his truth "that no necessity obliges him to communicate"[351] . 2º The multiplicity of the created world speaks of its non-divinity, which refers to God. But creation also has its own truth -which the spirit discovers on the basis of its work of delimitation and synthesis-, which is not identical with divine truth; and which is true only through the truth of God "who makes it possible and sustains it"[352] . 3º The creature, in opening itself to being in general, in this contact encounters "the quality of the absolute, of the divine"[353] , which is not available to the subject in an *a priori* form, but in the form of the concealment of its inner mystery. So, if the attitude proper to knowledge is receptivity and, therefore, service to truth; and these have a form of dialogue -within the relative-; then the encounter with the absolute, proper to every act of knowledge, also has a character of dialogue -within the absolute-. 4º "The inclusion of contingent being and knowledge within absolute being and knowledge necessarily means that all worldly being and consciousness are unveiled before the absolute"[354] . But since God is the absolutely mysterious and hidden, to be unveiled before him implies also to be hidden within his mystery, so that all finite knowledge is also an unveiling of God, which has the character of confession before God and before the world. This revelation of God in creation is already the limit of philosophy.

Vol. 2: Truth of God. This second volume deals with "how the eternal

Logos of God can be expressed in the finitude of the creature"[355] . That is, is it possible for God to speak in human language? Beginning with a *Johannine entry, he* introduces the topic with two preliminary affirmations that are both methodological and theological: 1º "Between what in the first volume was considered as truth and this expression of Jesus there is no continuity whatsoever, but only a leap"[356] , since Jesus is an *unexpected* revelation and can only be understood from within himself. It is the same leap, as already indicated, between metaphysics and biblical revelation in *Theological Aesthetics*. The division between this volume, on the Logos, and the next one, on the Spirit, is artificial, since in the incarnate Logos the Spirit also acts (vol. II); and the Spirit, in his action, makes the Risen One present (vol. III). This volume, then, will develop in five sections the possibilities of a Christological revelation, of which the first four are rather presuppositions for understanding what it means that the Word became flesh, which is the fifth section.

It begins with a reflection on *Divine Logic and Human Logic,* which attempts to find in human structures some "representability of the Trinitarian" with which the Logos can and must be connected, in order to be able to reveal itself[357] . He develops this on the basis of two fundamental ideas. First, he affirms that "the question about truth in theology is the question about its object: God"[358] . But since God is love, then the object of theology includes and demands love for Christ and God. And then he affirms that "a theology in which the logic of God takes the concrete form of a created logic cannot but be Trinitarian"[359] . Therefore, divine traces must be found in the created so that the Trinity can be revealed from them. Hence, he briefly presents the various efforts made in history to recognize these Trinitarian traces in the being of the mundane. Thus we find, for example, reflections on "otherness" (Blondel), the triads of Augustine (*memoria, intellectus, voluntas* [background of the spirit, self-consciousness, loving self-affirmation]) and of Richard of St. Victor (God, the other [the beloved], the third beloved in common [fecundity]), dialectical reflections (Hegel), the dialogical (Rosenzweig) and anthropological reflections on fecundity itself.

Previous reflections looked from the bottom up (*ana-logic in the realm of the world*). They have been useful representations, but clearly insufficient. That is why he now asks himself whether "human logic can provide a solid human basis for an authentic representation of divine logic"[360] . It is a question of showing the *Possibility of Christology,* that is, if the created reality is apt for the Logos of God to be *truly* expressed in it. He does so with two very central assertions for theology. In the first place, that the Logos is authentically the self-expression of God, which means that the *man* Jesus can present himself as the one who explains the Father (the exegete) and who "unveils in his own visibility the invisible God"[361] - maintaining the invisibility of the Father - because in his very and true humanity he makes present the Totally Other, starting from his action that always refers back to the Father. And this is possible only thanks to the fact that the human being has been created *as an* image of the Logos. It is the *analogia entis* brought to its maximum expression in the conjunction of the two natures in Christ: true God and true man in a single person (i.e., Christological *analogia entis*). And this - this is the second assertion - means that any negative theology in Christianity will always be corrected by the fact that God has willed to reveal himself authentically in his Word made flesh.

Then, after having reviewed the conditions of possibility of revelation in creation, he moves on to historical revelation. In *Logos and Logic in God* he draws the consequences of the basic principle that says that the economic Trinity (what we know of God by his revelation) is the only one that reveals to us the immanent Trinity (what God is in himself). This means that "it is only from Jesus' behavior with respect to the Father and the Holy Spirit" that we can know something "about the intra-Trinitarian relations of life and love in the one and only God"[362] . Thus, from the mission of the Son it follows that "the wellspring of divinity"[363] is the Father, who generates the Word as his own expression and product of his love. The Son, then, as an expression of the Father's love, can participate in the procession of the Holy Spirit. But the Son is also the place of the consistency of all creation, its archetype, since he is - by antonomasia

- the expression and the fruit of the Father's love. With , the possibility of the Logos/Son becoming the world is prepared, because everything created is also - in the created way - the image and expression of God's love.

The fourth presupposition is its *kata-logical aspects* (from top to bottom). Here it deepens and draws out the consequences of the previous presupposition. Since we know that God is Trinity and how He acts *ad extra* (= in the economy), then we can better understand why God has created the world and why the created possesses the form it has. Everything is born of "the unthinkable beforehand of the self-giving or self-emptying that makes the Father first of all the Father" and that can only be attributed to the gratuitous and infinite love of God. And this is possible to understand only if we dare to speak "of a first intra-Trinitarian 'kenosis,' which is nothing other than the positive 'self-dispossession' of God in the surrender of the totality of the divine essence in the processions"[364] . Then the divine hypostases are necessary since in God the "other" must exist - as necessary and absolute - for God to be love. And, therefore, it can be explained that the created "other" exists, not as a necessity but as a free exuberance of God's love. The difference between God and the creature is sustained by the difference - previous - between the Father and the Son, both of which are overcome (in the Hegelian sense) in the Spirit. But we know all this exclusively thanks to the revelation of the Son and the Spirit.

The fifth section - to which the aforementioned presuppositions pointed - is then *The Word became flesh* (*Verbum caro factum est*). In this long final section (over 100 pp.), he explains what it essentially means that the Logos of God became one like us. Three aspects are central. First, the meaning of becoming *flesh* (*Verbum caro*). To take on flesh means that the Logos has taken on the form of man, that he has become identical to every human being, but placing his accent on the corporeal, with all its weaknesses, which are taken on precisely to restore him who was disfigured and separated from his ultimate purpose. The Word, on the other hand, is the opposite of the flesh, but assumes the language of the flesh in order to fulfill its redemptive

mission. Secondly, it explains what it means to *become* flesh (*factum est*). It presupposes, first of all, the eternal will of the Logos to give himself to man, which implies that the immutable one becomes man, becoming "changeable himself in another" (Rahner). This is what allows the Logos to live as true man, and in the incarnation it is effectively "his own history"[365] . Moreover, "the decision of the incarnation of the Logos is Trinitarian"[366] and one of the Trinity has assumed the flesh, which implies the involvement of the whole Trinity in the salvific work. Finally, the Word, by becoming flesh, recapitulated everything in himself and became the definitive criterion of the God-creature relationship. Thirdly, he reflects on the fact that the Logos took on a flesh *similar to that of sin* (*caro peccati*) (Rom 8:3). This means to assume the same human condition that has said "no" to God and to suffer *in* it the contradiction of rejection and unbelief. But also, in that same flesh, to live absolute obedience to the Father, even to the abysses of hell and of God's abandonment, in order to erase the sins of the whole world from there. In this last point, he again has recourse to the theology of Adrienne von Speyr .[367]

Vol. 3: The Spirit of truth. It deals with the Holy Spirit insofar as he introduces us into "the full truth" (Jn 16:13), but tries to remain explicitly within the framework of this theme and is unable to offer a complete pneumatology, which has been presented throughout the entire work. It begins with *Preludes* that relate the theme of this volume to that of the previous one. In fact, if the Spirit leads to the full truth, that truth is Christ in his fullness; therefore, all pneumatology introduces Christology because the Holy Spirit, more than an object, is the subject of theology. He develops his pneumatology in six great themes, where the first three show who the Spirit is and the other three expose his action in the world.

The first, entitled *The Explainer,* clarifies and unfolds this concept - mentioned in Jn 16:13 - as the notion that *summarizes* the work of the Spirit and as a culminating expression of what the previous biblical authors - of the Old and New Testaments - said about the Spirit. To "lead us to the fullness of truth" does not mean that there are things left pending in Christ, nor does it refer to a synthesis of contents, but

rather it is to introduce us to participation in God, to help us understand the paschal mystery of Christ and to announce to us the eschatological future.

The second theme, somewhat more extensive, is *The Holy Spirit as a person.* This assertion is based on two biblical truths: (1) if the Spirit is "a principle that enters into God," then "he must be divine"[368] ; and (2) although "there is a vast sphere in which the Spirit appears as a quasi-personal force of God"[369] , nevertheless, God appears as the subject of that force and, although not identical to either the Father or the Son, he is not impersonal either and stands *between* the Father and the Son. From here Balthasar makes a historical journey, reviewing how the understanding of the Spirit as a person was arrived at, and what it means that it is the reciprocal love between Father and Son, substantiated as a gift. The Fathers of the Church, beginning with baptism and the liturgy, defined it as divine hypostasis (= subsistence) and, in the Middle Ages, the concept of person as "relationship" was deepened, which in this case meant that the Spirit was "simultaneously both: the love between Father and Son [...] and the visible fruit and witness of this love"[370] .

The third theme completes the identity of the Spirit, now in his relationship with the Son as the *two hands of the Father* (Irenaeus). Indeed, biblically, the Father is revealed in the two *hypostases* of the Son and the Spirit and only these two are the ones sent in a historical-salvific way. Here he develops three themes. First, in the act of revelation all of Jesus' activity was carried out in the co-presence of the Spirit. But "among all economic situations, there is no case in which an I-Thou relationship of Son and Spirit is reached. For the Son, only the Father is a thou; and this thou is in the Spirit"[371] . Indeed, the Son is led by the Spirit who communicates to him the will of the Father. Then - the second theme - shows the unity in the common soteriological work: (a) the Spirit divinizes us, that is, he makes us sons in the Son; (b) he makes us understand existentially, through faith, the action of the Son; and (c) he universalizes the work of the Son by forming the Church and acting in the hearts of *all* human beings. It ends by explaining the procession of the Spirit starting from

the Father and/by the Son (*Filioque*). He clarifies the history of the conflict around this theme; then he presents the differences between the theologies of East and West around the eternal procession of the Spirit; and ends by affirming that the solution to all this controversy has to maintain two fundamental truths: 1º The impossibility "of applying univocally the concept 'person' to the divine hypostases". 2º One must suppose a transcendental plurality in God - not a numerical one - so that God can be called love and, therefore, "the Spirit [can be the] quintessence and at the same time fruit of eternal love"[372] .

He then moves on to the action of the Spirit in the world. In the fourth theme, then, he refers to the *role of the Spirit in the work of salvation.* In the understanding that every action of the Spirit must always be understood in its relation to the work of the Father and the Son; and that the action of the Spirit is multiform; however, three basic concepts can be indicated that explain the specific work of the Spirit, because of its special relationship with him. 1st *Gift:* the Father, in giving himself to the Son, gives him everything, including his own capacity to give himself; so that the Son, in his grateful acceptance of generation, also gives himself to the Father, offering himself for all that the Father disposes. Mutual love is thus pure renunciation, pure love, a mutual gift. This is the Holy Spirit. 2° *Freedom:* the Father generates with absolute freedom and the Son is total availability; therefore, mutual love is always new, always surprising, full freedom. Such is the Holy Spirit. 3º *Witness:* the Spirit is and at the same time witnesses to the mutual love between Father and Son. Consequently, the Spirit is God's free gift, which gives freedom to the one who receives it to bear witness to God's love.

The extensive fifth theme speaks of *The Spirit and the Church* and shows the multiform action of the Spirit in the Church. Fundamentally, the Spirit endows the Church with her missionary condition that opens her to the whole world, in such a way that the unity proper to the Church, as the risen body of Christ, is ordered to the universal lordship of Christ in the world. Now, this Spirit poured out on the Church produces effects, both subjective-existential and objective-institutional, which signify an unlimited variety together

with an unsurpassable unity and where the objective and the subjective are mutually necessary and where, moreover, both are indispensable. Objectively, we find the triad composed of Tradition, Scripture and ministry, the proclamation of the Word and the liturgy, the sacraments, canon law and theology. Subjectively, we find prayer, forgiveness, experience of the Spirit, discernment of spirits and witness of life. Balthasar synthetically exposes each of these aspects.

It ends, more briefly, with two final themes. *Spirit and world,* which deals with the collaboration of the Holy Spirit - as a person - in creation, leading it towards its consummation, which, moreover, has already been accomplished by the recapitulation of Christ in his cross and resurrection. It is the realm of what we can call *spermata pneumatika* (= seeds of the Spirit)[373] . And the other theme he calls "*To the Father*", where he presents the Spirit - the only one who plumbs the depths of God[374] - as the one who leads the longing that every human being possesses to return to the Father. It is an impulse to reach the ultimate origin, which is both forward - with the following and the mission - and upward, wanting to participate in the glory of Christ and thus be able to see the Father. To see God is our ultimate and definitive vocation:

> We must immediately participate in the divine essence in order to be able to see it. And yet Thomas himself says that the saints see God as *infinitum, sed non infinite, totum, sed non totaliter* [infinite, but not infinitely, all of him, but not totally], and this precisely because he *infinite cognoscibilis est* [is infinitely cognizable]. But he immediately adds [...] that, if to see and understand means to embrace *(includere), sic nullo modo Deus comprehenditur,.... cum sit infinitus* [in no way in this way (= encompassing him) is God comprehended, since he is infinite]. An infinite love does not allow itself to be understood, but the more love one has, the more one can penetrate the incomprehensible . [375]

Epilogue

This brief volume is an aid to the reader of his entire *Trilogy,* offering "something like a perspective that encompasses the entire work"[376] . Symbolically, he divides it into portico, threshold and cathedral, which, as the image indicates, are successive steps of deepening his proposed understanding of the *Trilogy*. The *Portico* is a "kind of apologetics"[377] since Christianity is one possibility among many and, therefore, one "must try to prove its credibility and - according to his

own understanding - its peculiarity by means of purely spiritual arguments, which [...] must not frustrate the act of free faith and free surrender"[378] . The arguments for this "discernment" are threefold: (1) the general criterion of integration - "he who sees more truth, is more profoundly right"[379] -; (2) the capacity to accept the philosophical question about the foundation of all that is real; and (3) the capacity to take up the basic axioms of other religions. In this sense, Christianity, with its Trinitarian doctrine of God who is love, is capable of integrating the created "other" in its positivity and not annulling it in its encounter with God, and is also capable of assuming human finitude in the infinitude of God, which have been the insoluble difficulties for all other religions.

If "he who sees more is right," then we must ask ourselves what this "more" means[380] . Here, in *Threshold, he* attempts to answer it. The accumulation of reasons is never convincing. The only solution is the inversion of the question, that is, instead of the question about the ultimate problem ("the ultimate goal of human existence"[381]), to ask about the first thing, the obvious, the *being*. This is what he does in this second part. It is a matter of "asking about the light that is reflected from the Christian [...] in the fundamental philosophical question [...] that makes the genuinely philosophical shine"[382] . Being, illuminated by the theological light, shines with a brilliance that illuminates, in turn, the very light that illuminates it. This is what happens with being in its transcendentals (beautiful, good and true). From the *analogia entis,* the transcendentals of being illuminate the revelation as beautiful, good and true. Balthasar explains this further here - which is the structure underpinning his *Trilogy* - by which he attempts to accredit Christian revelation as that proposition which most integrates and, therefore, as that which is most true. He develops this explanation on the basis of the "real distinction" and the fundamental polarity that runs through all created being and its transcendentals. This is the longest part of this Epilogue.

The third part, the *Cathedral,* is developed already from within the same revelation and is what definitely illuminates the two previous steps. We are inside the cathedral. Indeed, Jesus Christ says "of

himself: 'I am the truth' [...] because everything true in the world 'has its consistency' in him (Col 1:17), which again presupposes that he personalizes in himself the *analogia entis,* [since] he is in finite being the adequate showing, giving and affirmation of God"[383] . But the reality of God to which the incarnate Son refers is transcendental. How, then, can the absolute be made present in a finite form? Only if God himself does so. This is the deeper meaning of the Logos made flesh. Jesus reveals Trinitarian love in a unity built only from God. It is the unity of the *Gestalt* (= form) of Jesus that points to the Father, but which can only be recognized with the simple, candid and pure eye of faith illuminated by the Holy Spirit. Jesus is an epiphany, awaiting the free acceptance of the human being who allows himself to be embraced by the reconciliation brought to him by the Risen One. And "will there be *all those* who allow themselves to be reconciled? No theology or prophecy can answer this question. But love *'hopes all things'* (1 Cor 13:7) [...] Such unlimited hope is not only Christianly permitted, but commanded"[384] . With this significant phrase Balthasar ends his 16 stupendous vols.

III. "Two halves of a whole". The theological relationship between Hans Urs von Balthasar and Adrienne von Speyr.

This is an indispensable topic in any study of Hans Urs von Balthasar's theology, but unfortunately it has not always been given due importance[385] . In fact, both from Balthasar's own testimony and from a simple review of his biography, it can be clearly perceived that Adrienne von Speyr played a very important role in his life -from 1940 until her death in 1967- which continued until the end of Balthasar's own life[386] . Here our purpose cannot be to study in all its breadth the common mission that they received from God, nor the fruits that have germinated from their work together, in particular, the Community of St. John[387] . Nor is it the place to investigate the influence that Balthasar has had on Adrienne, nor still less to expound the beautiful life, vocation, mission and work of Adrienne von Speyr[388] . The objective of this chapter is more limited and very precise - functional to the objective of this introductory book -: only to show to what extent and in what aspects Balthasar'*s theological* work, and in particular his *Trilogy,* is not only influenced by the experience of God, the life and theology of Adrienne von Speyr, but that - according to Balthasar's own awareness - both theologies are inseparable. Is this really so? Many studies on Balthasar - before more than now - have completely disregarded this issue, if not denied or misinterpreted it[389] . However, the current general consensus more honestly acknowledges Balthasar's theological debt to Adrienne[390] . In what sense can that be understood?

Self-awareness and Balthasar's testimony

Every author elaborates his thought on the basis of some sources that have inspired him -of various kinds: writings, personal encounters, life experiences, etc.- and this also happens with Balthasar -even in a programmatic way-, as was demonstrated in the first chapter. But here we ask ourselves about the existence of something more profound and

determining: the possibility that Balthasar's theological work is, in reality, a joint work with Adrienne von Speyr and that she is something more than a simple source of inspiration and help, which, although important, would have been just one more among them. The issue arises from Balthasar's own words, who has repeatedly and explicitly, as we have already mentioned, stated that "her [Adrienne's] work and mine [Balthasar's] are neither psychologically nor philologically dissociable, they are two halves of a whole, which has at its core a single basis"[391] . And he has repeated this on other occasions, from different points of view:

In 1968, providing a first look at Adrienne:

> Por mi parte, yo mismo me servía sin reparo de las intuiciones que me llegaban por ella [de Adrienne] para mis libros, escritos inmediatamente después de su conversión [...] Adrienne me dio innumerables sugerencias para homilías, conferencias y demás [...] Visto en conjunto y sabiendo que es imposible calcular exactamente cualquier proporción, puedo afirmar que yo he recibido teológicamente más de ella que ella de mí [...This explains [...] why I have tried to harmonize my way of contemplating Christian revelation with hers [...] Today, after her death, her work seems to me much more important than mine, and the edition of her *posthumous works* takes precedence over all my writings .[392]

In 1975, recalling his books written in the last 10 years:

> It is necessary to say a concluding word to remove the impression that in the books I have just mentioned and others, I have simply stated my own convictions. Most of what I have written is a translation of what is present in a more immediate, less technical way in the enormous work of Adrienne von Speyr [...] In the last 10 years the work left by that exceptional woman has been almost completed [...] Then it will be seen how strongly the intuitions of this woman have influenced my books: *The Heart of the World, The Problem of God in Man Today*[393] *, Theology of the Three Days. The Paschal Mystery*, and more than a few other works, which are essentially a theological transcription [of what] she has understood much more directly. That is a statement that can be verified only later .[394]

And in 1984, almost at the end of his life, he confirmed that the two works are inseparable:

> This book [*Our Task: Account and Plan*] has above all one purpose: to prevent any attempt being made after my death to separate my work from that of Adrienne von Speyr. The book demonstrates that this is not possible under any aspect, neither with regard to theology, nor with regard to the institute founded .[395]
>
> It should be noted in conclusion that all the fundamental themes of Adrienne's work described here do not play any role in my books and lectures before 1940, as they do in many Church Fathers and other theologians I may have studied. If these themes emerge in my works and lectures after 1940, this happens because of the adoption of what I learned

from Adrienne. This will have to be shown, considering that what I received from Adrienne has not stifled my own subject matter and way of thinking, but has enriched them. In these late works, to want to cleanly separate his and mine would be an undertaking without perspective .[396]

As can be clearly seen, Balthasar has no doubt about the indissoluble unity of the theological work of both, although each has his own literary style. This must be considered, then, with all the seriousness that corresponds to it. It can be understood from two perspectives. Firstly, Balthasar himself understands it within the not uncommon tradition of *missions received in common,* both biblical and in the history of the Church: "There are also 'double missions', which must be integrated as 'two halves of the moon', where each 'has first been led through a complicated path, which was necessary, in order to finally achieve a just combination' (Adrienne)"[397] . Here clearly their own biographies are recognized, about which Balthasar has said that both Adrienne's path before her conversion and his own philological studies before meeting her were only preparation for the common mission God had in store for them:

In our case, an intense collaboration with a view to a common external work was foreseen, for which the long preparation (for Adrienne from 1902 to 1940) was already internally oriented towards this integration. All this required two things: an important diversity of paths (for her it was a seemingly endless search for Catholic truth, the medical profession, even the experience of marriage), (for me the philological formation, then the philosophical-theological with its orientation towards the knowledge of the spiritual tradition of the Church, within which I was later able to situate how much was proper and new in the vision of Adrienne); and, at the same time, an affinity or coordination that makes the diverse coincide in the complementary .[398]

Balthasar mentions there the examples of John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila, St. John Eudes and Maria des Vallées or Francis de Sales and Jeanne de Chantal[399] . In fact, as Fr. Ricci affirms, "in the history of Christian spirituality we have often been in the presence of saints who have lived an intense spiritual relationship with a woman, a relationship of intense friendship and great intimacy" that, in its deepest identity, has been kept secret from the rest of their most intimate circle, including, at times, confessors and superiors[400] . But in our case it is even more than that. It is not simply a matter of friendship, nor of the help - rather asymmetrical - that one of the two

could give to the other (e.g. the confessor to the penitent); but of a mission received *in common*, where *both* are indispensable and irreplaceable for the development of that common mission, in such a way that they could not carry it out without the collaboration of one to the other and vice versa. It is a mission that can only be understood in mutual collaboration. In other words, the work of the two together is greater and more fruitful than the sum of each one individually. In this collaboration there is a "catalyzation" that multiplies the fruits. An analogy - in another sphere of things - can be seen, for example, in the case of a musical group that dissolves, many times each of the artists - individually - and even the sum of them does not revive even close to the quality of the production nor the previous success of the group[401] . This is the case of Balthasar and Adrienne, whose collaboration and joint work allowed both the unfolding of Adrienne's work, and broadened in essential points Balthasar's theology.

For Balthasar it was very evident that they possessed a common vocation, given by God, as he expresses it in his 1977 book: "It is not rare that he [= God] brings together in pairs so that they are no longer two separate callings, but 'two in one calling'. Such unions can have the same necessity and urgency as the call itself, and what is written about the natural union worked by God can apply to them: 'What God has joined together, let no man put asunder' (Mt 19:6)"[402] . But this common vocation of Balthasar and Adrienne is not, above all, for theological production, but for "the institution and consolidation of the Community of St. John"[403] . Balthasar affirms that he exists "first of all for it and for its members. Only if such communities emerge as those to be founded, I believe, is the Church seriously helped today." Therefore, literary theological production should only be understood as "a help also for our community and for the men who are interested in this spirit". And along with this, he thinks that "one will really know [her] things [= theology] with verisimilitude only when scholars take Adrienne seriously"[404] . In such a way that Balthasar understands his theology perfectly integrated in the common mission with Adrienne which is to found and carry forward the Community of St. John. This must also be a hermeneutical principle when interpreting Balthasar's

theology.

The second perspective is the biography of the theologian, because it necessarily influences his or her thinking, which is not apart from what God himself is building in each person. If theology is a reflection of one's own faith and believing praxis, and of the communitarian experience of that same faith, then that reflection cannot be done in a way that is totally alien to what has been experienced in one's own relationship with God as an ecclesial vocation received; beyond the fact that the attempt will always be to frame that reflection within the great tradition and thought of the Church as a whole, starting from its own sources and with an adequate method. In this way it is not possible to abstract oneself from one's own biographical perspective when doing theology. In it are found his foundational experiences of faith, the horizon of the ultimate meaning of life and the original place from which he perceives the reality of the world, all of which also determines the understanding that he will acquire about God, the fundamental interests of his reflection and the way in which he will carry out his mission in life.

If this is so, Adrienne von Speyr must have played a relevant role in Balthasar's theological production after their meeting. This is for two fundamental reasons -beyond the normal influence in their life having worked 27 years together-: (1) because Balthasar recognized in her a special charism of God, which implied a joint mission; and (2) because, within that charism, he considered himself a humble servant -a stenographer of Adrienne's works-, from which he would try to transmit that content also from his own theology[405] . In other words, Balthasar tried to put in writing, through his theological production, the great theological intuitions that Adrienne transmitted to him during the years of writing his own writings (dictated to Balthasar), placing them in relation to the whole of Christian history and tradition[406] . Otherwise one cannot understand - her words - the "long and painful history of [her] departure from the Order"[407] , "the Society of Jesus [, which] was the beloved homeland, my natural home", "when there was no longer any prospect of being able to fulfill within it the task given to us of founding a new community"[408] , since in the

eventual case of having remained in the Order, she would have had to move away from the common vocation received and duly discerned. It is a very important decision that can only be understood from the awareness of a new call from God that places him at the service of the common mission with Adrienne, which must necessarily be reflected in his theological writings. Indeed, he states with conviction:

> During those twenty-seven years, and notwithstanding a meticulous observation of his interior life as a father confessor and spiritual guide, I never had the slightest doubt about the righteousness of his mission or about the humble purity with which he lived it and transmitted it. This explains why I have not only made the hardest decisions of my life - such as leaving the Society of Jesus - in conformity with his indications, but also why I have tried to harmonize my way of contemplating Christian revelation with his .[409]

A charisma that must be interpreted

Adrienne von Speyr (1902-1967) was born in La Chaux-de-Fonds (Switzerland) into a Protestant family. She was a woman full of talents, very sympathetic and intelligent, a great reader and music lover. Following the example of her father, who was an eye doctor, she also wanted to follow this profession since she was a child. Since her childhood and adolescence, with beautiful but also painful moments, she had a life of prayer and penance unusual for her age, which came naturally to her, where she also received some extraordinary graces and was the object of some mystical experiences. Without much awareness of the special graces she received, her entire youth was marked by a tireless spiritual quest, which found no response in the ecclesial world around her. Despite the illnesses she suffered and the lack of more determined support from her family, she became a doctor, a vocation that filled her with joy and which she always understood as a selfless service to the whole human being, body and spirit, individual and in relation to others. She married, first to Emil Dürr, a widower with two children, and when he died, she married again to Werner Kaegi, a professor of history, with whom she lived until her death.

In 1940, in her untiring spiritual search, she approached Balthasar, a student chaplain who had recently arrived in Basel, who - at last someone! - was able to answer her old and deep concerns and, in

addition, she discovered in Catholicism what she had always "intuitively" believed in[410] . Baptized - on condition - on the feast of All Saints that year, she began a new stage of her life. "Immediately after the conversion a veritable cataract of mystical graces began to pour over Adrienne", "a whirlwind apparently without order"[411] , above all, visions of saints and internal and external experiences of the passion of Jesus. From that moment he began a joint work with Balthasar, which did not stop in the following years and produced the two most visible fruits of this common mission received: the call - felt immediately after the conversion - to found the Community of St. John, a secular institute of men and women existing to this day; and the dictation of his commentaries on the Scriptures and other theological works, from 1943/4 to 1953, which ended up being around 60 volumes, all of which are now published. The final years of Adrienne's life were more and more sacrificial, of greater renunciation, with experiences of profound prayer, which were accompanied by successive illnesses that finally led her to her death.

Balthasar, almost from the moment he met Adrienne, came to the conclusion that she was endowed with a *charism* given by God, "that is, a service assigned by God (Rom 12:3-6!) for the whole Church"[412] . This, like every charismatic grace, is granted to "fan the fire of the central core of faith under the breath of the Holy Spirit", as a "medial revitalization of Christian revelation"[413] . On the other hand, Balthasar, in his extensive literary work, has shown the conviction that -historically- behind the great works or theological syntheses there is always the experience of a renewed religious experience -a new charism, the foundation of a community, a new way of evangelizing, etc.-, that is to say, an experience that we can *roughly* call *prophetic*. "Prophecy in the sense of the Old and New Testament is not a prediction of the future, but a precise and comprehensible transmission and interpretation (Jn 1:18) of what God has to say to the Church and to the world about himself and about them"[414] . For example, Bonaventure's synthesis arises as a reflection of the Franciscan charism; and St. Augustine is not well understood without taking into account the monasticism that was spreading and

consolidating at that time, and many other cases could be cited. There is an intimate relationship between prophecy and theology in the sense that the development of theological reflection, although it has a rational articulation, is "*Theo-logical*" precisely because it is moved and carried forward by a prophetic impulse -which is therefore *religious,* in the deepest meaning of the term- that makes it discover or revive aspects of revelation less considered at that time .[415]

Balthasar reads Adrienne's charism under this understanding: it is a prophecy in the sense we have explained. "Adrienne von Speyr [...] had, to an extraordinary degree, the charism of prophecy, in the sense indicated to us by St. Paul and St. Thomas Aquinas: the gift of the Holy Spirit not only to see divine realities, but also to be able to expound and interpret them, despite their depth and breadth, in a form comprehensible to all and useful to the Church"[416] . Indeed, for him "the authentic charismatic function, as the service of a member of the Church to the community, can normally only be exercised in grace". It is with this objective - and only with this - that Adrienne's mystical experiences and the other spiritual phenomena she lived must be understood:

> Adrienne von Speyr has rescued mysticism from the cornered existence to which it was destined and in which it was silenced - increasingly unknown and even scorned by theology and official preaching - and has restored it to the center of the salvific event. This center is the interchange between the Word of God in Christ and the listening-response to this Word carried out by the Spouse-Church .[417]

For Balthasar, there is "mysticism in the Catholic and ecclesial sense" of the term where the word of God is listened to "with all one's heart, with all one's existence, where one perseveres in and in the face of the opening of the very heart of God in the midst of fire and night", like "Moses, who perseveres in the devouring fire and listens until the end, only later to announce and explain to the people what he has heard" (Dt 5:23-26)[418] . Thus, in Adrienne von Speyr there is clearly also this listening to the word of God, which is expressed in her biblical commentaries[419] , by far the most important part of all her literary work and where, in a narrative way, one can find the most central part of her theology. In other words, Adrienne, starting from her mystical experiences, with the dictation of her books put at the service

of the Church a renewed understanding of revelation in the service of a contemporary ecclesial mission. In this way it can be better understood in what sense Balthasar's theology is illuminated by Adrienne's prophecy or, in other words, the prophecy behind his theology is Adrienne's life and writings.

Indeed, it is important to understand that

> Mysticism is not primarily a phenomenon of religious history [= "mysticism"...] nor a psychological phenomenon [= "mental states"...]. Christian mysticism is not about "religion", nor about "soul", but about the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, mediated by a special state - carried out by the Holy Spirit - of the ecclesiastical receiver and mediator. The prophetic and mystical forms contrast so little with each other [...] that they are virtually identical in origin .[420]

In this sense, the "Christian mystical" experience is subject to biblical revelation and is addressed to the Church for a specific mission. It is not primarily a matter of a "state", nor of subjective elements, but first of all of "the transmission of a truth and a message"[421] , which cannot be identified simply with the psychological states of the person. The person chosen is only an "objective" instrument. All this puts Adrienne's experience in a very different category from that of a simple psychological aid for Balthasar. Indeed, "Adrienne von Speyr's mysticism [...] is peculiar in not making the supernatural-psychological particularly thematic, but in functionally understanding all states in terms of the objective to be transmitted"[422] . As J. Servais rightly says, "an interpretation that puts in the foreground the sensible 'experience' or the 'states' experienced, thus betrays the intention of this work that only wants to be the transmission of a truth and of a content that, in itself, is independent of its bearer"[423] . Balthasar states it explicitly: "Adrienne's mission, however, was not only to suffer subjectively physical pain and abysmal states of emotional suffering, but also to give a precise theological interpretation of them"[424] . This is an instrumental help so that together they can reach the depths of revelation, that is, to reach the divine Trinitarian depths of the word of God in Christ[425] . Balthasar "has received Adrienne's work as an autonomous source of properly theological inspiration" . [426]

Joint work

Balthasar was also clear that a common *vocation* implied a common *mission*. He states: "Certainly, I had an overabundance of evidence that such a task existed and that it could not be interpreted in any other way [than the way we understood it]. God, undoubtedly, still has the possibility of speaking with unequivocal clarity to one of his creatures, and precisely in the Church"[427] . And later he will say that "the letters [of Adrienne to Balthasar] emphasize very strongly that our two tasks from now on [= since Adrienne's conversion] have become one"[428] . We cannot here expand on the common mission which, as we have already indicated, is the St. John Community, for which the publishing house and Balthasar's theology are at the service; a service that is otherwise open to the whole world[429] . We must focus only on what Adrienne von Speyr meant for Balthasar's *theology*.

There are two modes of influence. On the one hand, something that we could call normal in a usual confessor-penitent relationship and in every spiritual friendship. Adrienne, according to Balthasar's own testimony, helped him by giving him "advice", based on "questions he asked her", she also gave him ideas and suggestions "for the series of annual public conferences that [he gave] in Basel, also for the Sunday sermons in St. Mary's Church"[430] . He gave him special help in the spiritual exercises, not only with his prayer and penance, but also by helping him to better understand the interior situation of the retreatants[431] . In a more practical way she also helped him by reading the drafts of his works[432] and other books "about which she asked him for his judgment, which was always accurate"[433] . And there was also a form of help that consisted in "the relentless correction and formation of his father confessor"[434] . All this already indicates a profound relationship, which implies a vital influence, and which naturally must have crossed over to the theological plane.

Much more relevant, however, was the help he received from his own service to Adrienne. Balthasar acknowledges that she "was formed by me [= Balthasar] both then and later through our dialogues on questions of a religious nature"[435] , which is undeniable; but, on the other hand, Balthasar listened to her account of her mystical experiences and helped her to understand them in their

integrity and totality. Indeed, "Adrienne did not sufficiently understand some of her experiences and visions and [he] exposed them to him so that he could interpret them"[436] . And then, in the year 1943, when Adrienne began her dictations[437] , her task was already much more decisively to interpret and place that teaching within the great tradition of the Church[438] . Here the work of interpretation was much more relevant. Balthasar placed at Adrienne's disposal all his philological-theological instruments so that this mystical experience could not only be expressed in human language, but could also be expressed in a theological language understandable to all and in harmony with all the other religious experiences and theological developments in the history of Christianity. Indeed, Balthasar wrote - with his own hand - the entire work dictated to him by Adrienne. He himself explains:

> Through my preceding literary, philosophical and theological training I was provided with a means of examining the abundance of her theological insights and giving them appropriate expression (since this was not a mechanical process, but required Adrienne's participation in the analysis of what was seen spiritually, which, however, in turn presupposed for me something like a Catholic point of view and vocabulary) .[439]

Therefore, "during [those] ten years," in which Adrienne was dictating to him her commentaries on some "books of Sacred Scripture"[440] and transmitting her deep insight into "the divine truths" for the other texts of his extensive production, Balthasar cannot but have received a profound influence from Adrienne. It was finished after ten years, only at Balthasar's own request, since it seemed to him that "it had reached its limit, both for the reader's possibilities and for his own"[441] . This work began with the Gospel of John, the center of his spirituality, to continue with the other biblical and thematic books, such as *The Handmaid of the Lord, The World of Prayer* or *The Confession,* among many others[442] . We cannot explain here all her production, nor even less its content[443] . However, "dictation was at first difficult for Adrienne [...] But soon her dictations became so fluid, her propositions so precise, that she herself renounced revision and [Balthasar was able] to transcribe what she says without any problem"[444] . Sometimes Adrienne explains something to him, so that Balthasar, in his stenographed notes, writes an extra paragraph with

that explanation, so that his own style can sometimes appear in Adrienne's books. However, that cannot mean that it was Balthasar who induced Adrienne's theology, since "the originality of his theology" (with respect to that of pre-1940 Balthasar) and its "astonishing internal coherence despite the many diverse themes" argue for the contrary[445] . In this regard, Balthasar insists:

> Two things must be affirmed at the same time: first, Adrienne's perfectly free initiative in welcoming what was inspired to her, and also in translating it into a human language, understandable to me, which I had to write down; secondly, on my part, a certain preparation for this transmission: Adrienne insisted that the transmission should be "ecclesially precise"; my contribution consisted, above all, in freeing it from any reflection on itself and in making the whole process unfold in the atmosphere of confident obedience to the Church (represented by the father confessor) .[446]

As a result of all this we can perceive a profound rapport in the work of both of them. On the one hand, Balthasar gives him all the hermeneutical means for an adequate translation of his "prophecy" - and with this there is obviously a beneficial influence on Adrienne - and, on the other hand, the work of interpreting that prophecy is never something simply mechanical, but involves trying to understand it from its articulating heart and then explain it, in the sense of *unfolding it,* showing its parts, seeing its internal and external coherence, in order to then write it down for the reader. Balthasar himself reflects this when he refers to the contribution that Henri De Lubac made to him with "his teaching on the fourfold meaning of the Scriptures": "without those indications I would not have been able to understand in an adequate way or to reproduce the dictates of Adrienne von Speyr in the exactness of her intention, nor in the almost incalculable variety of her theological points of view"[447] . Thus, such a work of explanation is arduous and, above all, it usually involves *internally* assuming such teaching, all the more so when one is convinced that it all comes from a special grace of God that must be placed at the service of the Church, as was Balthasar's conviction. In a certain way, when someone perceives that something comes from God, he necessarily assumes it with a certain obligatory character for himself as well. This is what is proper to prophecy: to challenge.

In synthesis, we can affirm -with Fisichella-: "It is in this horizon of

'interpretation' that the thesis takes shape according to which, in our opinion, in his work [= Balthasar's] it is clearly expressed that the theological sense is inserted in the optics of prophecy". "That which in the one is perceived, in the other becomes the fruit of theological reflection. Where does true theology exist? In perception or in reflection? In both, because faith necessarily lives from this unity that requires both the moment of the *auditus* and the effort of the intellectus"[448] . Hence Balthasar has been able to say, in all tranquility, that "after 1941, [his own books] are already largely influenced [by] [Adrienne's] thought"[449] and that his theological work is inseparable from hers.

Theological confluence

In several passages of his *Trilogy*, Balthasar recognizes that he is following Adrienne's ideas. For example, in the fifth part of *Theologica* II, when he speaks of the incarnation and passion of the Word[450] ; or at the beginning of *Theodramatica* IV, when he reflects on the Apocalypse[451] ; or in *Theodramatica* V, where he does so in a truly programmatic way: "In this concluding volume, sentences taken from works by Adrienne von Speyr have often been quoted [...] The quotations attest only to the basic coincidence between her conceptions and mine with respect to many eschatological themes treated here"[452] . Let us now review concretely what this theological confluence consists of and what is the extent of this theological confluence and what are those themes in which we find a greater (and decisive) influence of Adrienne on Balthasar, or also, a joint development of the theology of both of them. We will do so from three different approaches, complementary to each other.

Adrienne von Speyr's central themes

We cannot offer here a synthesis of Adrienne von Speyr's voluminous work[453] , but in order to have a point of comparison we must at least indicate the central elements of her theology. Since Balthasar himself edited her works, it is methodologically correct to base ourselves on what he himself describes as the core of her theology. For this we have two types of sources: the two fundamental texts in which

Balthasar presents Adrienne (*A First Look* and *Our Task*); and the introductions or presentations written by Balthasar to the different volumes of Adrienne's work, as well as some conferences given by Balthasar to explain Adrienne's work.

In *A First Look at Adrienne von Speyr* she devotes long pages to expounding her work[454] starting "from the fundamental attitude that permeates everything" and to "point out the theological-historical salvific place of this fundamental attitude"[455] ; something she repeats more briefly in *Our Task. Recuento y plan*[456] , summarizing Adrienne's central themes.

The center of Adrienne's theology is in the *yes* of Mary, the handmaid of the Lord[457] , which indicates the fundamental Christian attitude (*Grundhaltung*): "Mary is absolutely ready for everything, for much more than she herself can know, imagine or glimpse," in order to be "free for whatever the eternal divine freedom disposes" which will always be the best[458] . "However, this yes alone is illuminated by being contained and embraced by its presupposition: it is secondary response to the primary Word of God"[459] . "From God's perspective, this yes is the highest grace. And from man's perspective, it is the most complete service, made possible by grace: unconditional and definitive gift"[460] . "Only with man's yes can God do something sensible, in a natural and supernatural way. Only by entering into this yes can the Son of God become man: first in Mary and again in everyone who tries to correspond to this yes"[461] . This total availability for the mission is at the service of the Church and is already promised to human beings from their very baptism as a grace. In this sense it has a definitive character, not only on the part of God, but also the response of the human being must have this definitive character, being an unreserved, unconditional and totally transparent response before God. This attitude is designated by Adrienne as "attitude of confession", that is, a perfect nakedness or transparency before the Lord and before the Church -and before our sins-, for obedience to the mission . [462]

Along with this fundamental attitude and as its theological root, Adrienne develops five transversal themes, which are also essential in her own theology. First, *the obedience of the Son*. According to

Johannine theology, "the Son's whole life of obedience is simply the expression of his perfect love for the Father, his will and his mission"[463] . Christological (and soteriological) obedience is "the revelation in human form of the eternal love of the divine Son to his eternal Father, who out of love eternally generated him"[464] . Thus the obedience of the Christian is always participation in the attitude of obedience of the Church, who in turn enters into the obedience of Christ as his body and bride.

This brings us to the second theme: *the Trinitarian life,* which is one of Adrienne's most novel arguments. Following that theological conviction that discovers in the Trinitarian economy a reflection of the immanence of the Trinity, she affirms that the obedience of the Son who, through the work of the Spirit, becomes incarnate and then, led by the same Holy Spirit, annihilates himself for us until the death of the cross and the descent into hell, expresses very well in what sense and how it can be understood that God is love; and, moreover, it introduces us to the Trinity itself.

> Two dominant ideas emerge. First, the cross as a Trinitarian event: the Father and the Spirit are involved and participate in the event of the Son's abandonment of God. And, secondly, our mysterious being represented on the cross by the Son: the Father can henceforth contemplate and appreciate the world only through the Son .[465]

The third theme is *the world of prayer,* also a Trinitarian theme[466] . There she speaks, in a bold and anthropomorphic way, of "prayer in the Trinity". For her, all our prayer must conform to the archetype of Trinitarian dialogue.

> Each divine Person perceives and recognizes God in the other Persons, and God is always greater - beyond any conclusive conceptual understanding - and worthy of eternal adoration. Therefore, the Trinitarian "dialogue" has the form of the original prayer in which every prayer in the world participates and to whose "atmosphere" it must adapt itself, whether it is adoration, thanksgiving or petition: the original archetype of every prayer is in the Trinitarian dialogue .[467]

It is a beautiful way of understanding, both in the Trinitarian life and in the Christian life of prayer, what dialogue with God is. Now, it is clear that all this teaching is born in a very evident way from Adrienne's mystical experience, which makes her break the barriers between Heaven and earth and draw the consequences, to the bottom,

of the economic relationship of the Son with the Father .[468]

But, undoubtedly, the fourth theme "is the greatest theological gift that Adrienne von Speyr has received from God and has bequeathed to the Church"[469] : *the mystery of Holy Saturday*. However, this doctrine is not born in the first place from her reflection, but from the deep experiences of participation in the sufferings of the Lord's passion that, as a grace, she received for many years, particularly in the days of Holy Week, and which made her understand very deeply what happened there and what Jesus could have felt and experienced[470] . Adrienne understood Christ's descent into hell as a supreme act of love and obedience to the Father. "Hell is (already in the Old Testament) the place where God is not" and, therefore, there is no faith, no hope, no love there. "It is that which is condemned and cast out of his creation by the God who judges, it is [...] that from which he departs for all eternity"[471] , "which the Cross has separated from man and humanity"[472] . It is precisely there that Christ enters, but not triumphantly as the Eastern iconography shows him, but as a corpse, and where he knows what extreme separation from God is and means and how far the consequences of man's freedom can go. There Jesus can perform his last act of obedience and extreme trust in the Father. A corpse can only wait and obey.

The last theme is all the *ecclesiological consequences* of the previous aspects[473] . From the Mariology described above arises an accentuated ecclesiology, which is founded on that original cell of the Church which is Mary and John at the foot of the cross, in which four aspects stand out: 1º The mystery of the Church is understood starting from the mystery of Christ-Church, spouse-bride (Eph 5) and from the relationship Mary-John as mother and son (Jn 19). It is therefore an ecclesiology incarnated in human realities[474] . 2º The Christological concept of *mission,* where every Christian has a different assignment, but within a unique and common "net of fish"[475] . This supposes full availability for what God entrusts to each one as an ecclesial mission. 3º The Church is the *communio sanctorum* of an innumerable number of saintly and less saintly Christians, but who are in constant prayer. It is a praying community, in permanent dialogue with God[476] . 4º The

Church has been endowed with "mysticism" as a charism in function of the mission[477] . It is not a matter of psychological order, but theological and in relation and service to the nucleus of the salvific event.

After all this journey, not only is it clear that the center of Adrienne's theology is clearly *Jesus Christ*[478] , but also the unity of her theology, in spite of being spread out in so many works that deal with so many different themes. This is very important in order to understand the harmony with the work of Balthasar, also dispersed in many works, but with the same thematic and theological unity. Knowing then the core of Adrienne's theology, let us now review the proper *theological* influence on Balthasar, recognized and valued by himself.

Theological nature of Adrienne von Speyr's influence on Balthasar

If one reviews all of Balthasar's *Introductions* or *Prologues* (*Einführung, Einleitung, Geleitwort, Vorwort*) to the books of Adrienne von Speyr, one can perceive that, for him, what is important is the theological content of Adrienne's dictations and everything else that refers to her "states" has importance only as a means to express and understand that objective content which, moreover, is oriented to the mission of the Church. On the one hand, as we have already mentioned, this is born in Balthasar from his certainty that Adrienne possesses a prophetic charism given by God. But, on the other hand, this is also expressed in four characteristics that Balthasar recognizes in Adrienne's work and which show its essential theological character.

For Balthasar, Adrienne's work has a clear systematic-christological character in which her various teachings form a properly assembled whole, and in which each of its parts is related to the others as "variations on a single basic theme"[479] . He has called it a "polycentric" totality[480] , but which is well organized around some themes that order the whole. It is a systematicity in a prophetic key, that is, with many figures and apparent dispersion, but with a mysterious and true ilation, perceptible only from the whole of his work. Some quotations confirm this:

The thought is harmoniously found within its entire "system" (*Systems*), in which the fundamental attitudes and actions of the Christian are understood and derived from the attitudes and actions of Christ and God Himself respectively .[481]

The main themes of Adrienne von Speyr's teaching form a firmly assembled and insoluble whole, whose parts refer to each other and support and sustain each other .[482]

What God wanted to play on the instrument offered to him in this way could by no means be guessed beforehand or even glimpsed. But they are very specific and clearly defined themes that have been played over the years. However outlined and unmistakable they may be, they are interwoven with hidden and unbreakable threads; in fact, they turn out to be variations - often very bold and unexpected - on a single basic theme .[483]

Adrienne's theology remains "polycentric". However, in his total vision there are certain magnetic points that order and make perceptible around them aspects that are quite distant from each other .[484]

As confirmation of all this we can point out that, if within this harmonious totality one of the nuclei - if not the most important - of Adrienne's theology is the mystery of Holy Saturday, precisely on this theme - in the *Preface* to Adrienne's book *Ignatiana* - Balthasar repeats the same conviction, indicating - precisely on this theme that underlines in a special way the experiential aspect of Adrienne's charism - the purely theological character of her message and of her entire work:

The most important thing to say and to see in this preface is that the center of Adrienne's theology, the "key" of his theology, is the mystery of Holy Saturday; in it, for the first time in the history of theology, a door is opened from which the unforeseeable will emerge [...] the *descensus ad ínferos* [= descent into hell], as Adrienne experienced it, is the ultimate Christological truth of Ignatian obedience: the mission to seek the Father where he is not and cannot be: in the darkness of abandonment contrary to God. And from here the whole incalculable fullness of Adrienne's theology and spirituality has been organized... .[485]

2. Therefore, although Adrienne experienced innumerable extraordinary mystical phenomena during her life, Balthasar insists - repeatedly - that all of this was experienced exclusively in the service of her *theological* task of illuminating the Christian mysteries that needed to be highlighted at that time; therefore, the phenomena themselves, with the passing of time, receded for the sake of the content. They were only an "existential" way or a "body language" to express, with all their being, an essentially theological content. We can offer some quotations:

Although Adrienne certainly may have experienced all the phenomena known in the history of mysticism (such as visions, cardiognosis, healing, bilocation, levitation, stigmata,

etc.), they did not play any prominent role in her worldly or spiritual life .[486]

> The material and striking phenomena receded later, when the spiritual work began, the miracles that occurred again and again became so inconspicuous that they could be overlooked by most; everything experienced was put at the service of the central task of illustrating in the present the Christian mysteries through their word and through their whole existence .[487]
>
> The theology of mysticism [...] does not focus primarily on the experience (*noësis*), but on the experienced (*noëma*): the mystic, like the prophet and the author of the Apocalypse in the Bible, is above all a "servant of Jesus," even if his name is John (Rev 1:1), who has been entrusted with an announcement to the Church. Subordinating only to the objective, in order to be able to transmit it in integrity, the seer, the hearer, the one who has the experience must be as pure of heart as possible. Therefore, in this theory, once again negatively, the subjective stages are not in the foreground .[488]

Here again we can apply the extreme example of his experiences of hell. There, in that profound *subjective* experience, *there* is - paradoxically - a maximum *objectivity* for a content to be transmitted:

> In the state of hell, faith, love, hope, the whole living Christian life is "deposited" in God. The speaker is reduced to a pure "mission", to a mere transmitting "voice" [...] Adrienne is not "herself", but "a mission" to be "transmitted" [...] From a theological point of view, however, it contains a wealth of very valuable insights and statements and is perhaps the most direct access to what Adrienne von Speyr's mystical mission was and must have been in its essence .[489]
>
> [Hell is] a state of complete depersonalization, in which she even no longer knew her surroundings, and whose purpose was the purely objective transmission of some truth and understanding .[490]

3. Now, the theology that she transmits is the prayerful fruit of the truly prophetic experience of being the bearer of a word that came *from* God. Adrienne had no prior theological training, although she had a very penetrating intelligence, so that her words were the fruit of supernatural inspiration and discernment, based on her natural qualities and the mystical experiences she had received. Balthasar, in order to underline the revealed or inspired quality of her teaching, insists that Adrienne did not possess academic degrees in theology, but she did possess special human and spiritual qualities - also a gift from God - that made her very suitable for her prophetic mission:

> Adrienne von Speyr studied neither theology nor exegesis. Nor is there almost any quotation, only very rarely, and usually one that could occur to anyone. On the other hand, she has received the gift of hearing every word that now resounds, as what it is, the Word of God. Revelation of eternal, triune love in the Word that became flesh .[491]
>
> The fact that this [objective theology] - since the physician Adrienne has not followed any

theological studies and has hardly engaged in the corresponding readings - is based on "subjective" experiences, sufferings, motions, etc., is not described here. "subjective", is not described here; therefore, all her statements about these "subjective" conditions are excluded [...] Incidentally, it is clearly shown through the personal imprinting of one's thoughts, which is not the fruit of reading and thinking, but is based on inspiration, which, of course, together with the natural intelligence of the one who dictates, does not exclude but includes the constant effort to find the correct expression of what is shown .[492]

But, evidently, his admirable intelligence, his life of prayer placed at the service of the word of God and the supernatural gifts received in his long nights of prayer are not clearly distinguishable, much less separable from each other, but form a whole at the service of God's revelation:

No one can distinguish how much of his formulations are introduced directly from above and how much is conditioned by his prayerful reflection .[493]

No one reading the following pages can fail to recognize that the power of expression, differentiation and characterization of thought requires a very unusual natural intelligence and an equally unusual supernatural discernment of spirits .[494]

Above all, Balthasar recognizes in Adrienne an absolute readiness to listen that makes her especially apt both to receive this "word" and to transmit it as transparently as possible. This is called, by Adrienne, a necessary "attitude of confession", that is to say, pure openness and full availability to listen and transmit - as cleanly as possible of subjective intentions - the "objective" message of the revelation received. In fact, "throughout many of her works runs and emerges the concept, created by her, of the *attitude of confession*"[495] . Of course, none of this can in any way ignore, neither in Balthasar's conscience nor in the reality of Adrienne's dictates, the hermeneutical conditions of any transmitted message. It will always be marked by the language and the life of the transmitter, as well as by the community and the objective of those who receive it. And here nothing of this is denied, but on the contrary, precisely from this same hermeneutical conditionality, Adrienne's charismatic-prophetic quality and humble availability and obedience, as well as her Ignatian attitude of indifference (*Gelassenheit*), made her try to disappear under the "objective" word she had to say. It was a question, as far as possible, of not adulterating the transmission with objectives or intentions other than the disinterested identification with the mission of the Church.

Two texts by Balthasar confirm this:

> Adrienne's obedience is perfect and complete, as the natural and mystical proofs have shown again and again. The following ten themes [from *Das Allerheiligenbuch I*] were only possible because of this absolute obedience. His soul was a soft clay with which God could knead any form without resistance. Something so delicate that the Holy Spirit could dare to mold central aspects of biblical revelation into it and present them for the first time in this new enlightenment of Christianity .[496]

> The state of confession in which Adrienne wanted to find herself is called: pure openness and availability, the whole soul alone as a photographic plate, which can record and transmit everything as it is given. If this integrity did not exist, Adrienne said, there would be no way of knowing "how much of what is given belongs to the saint himself and how much to myself." [...] It is the attitude of that soul which since Origen has been called "*anima ecclesiastica*", ecclesial soul, the perfection of the Ignatian "*sentire cum Ecclesia*" .[497]

This is certainly a complex subject and here we cannot enter into a hermeneutical discussion -always useful, by the way-; but we only want to indicate -with Balthasar- that the availability for "objective" transmission is not opposed or in contradiction with the fact that this same message will always be transmitted with the language and life experience of Adrienne, together with Balthasar -as stenographer and translator-, in a joint work, as we have already indicated. Here it is only important to emphasize that with all this Balthasar is only underlining that in Adrienne's life and work the message delivered is much more important than the experiences of the person, that is to say, we are, in the first place, facing the transmission of a *theology*.

Thematic influences recognized by Balthasar

In his presentation of Adrienne, especially in *Our Task. Recuento y plan*[498] , Balthasar also makes explicit the themes of Adrienne that have influenced his own most important texts. There he states that "Adrienne's spiritual participation in [his] works written after [his] meeting with her" obliges him to recognize that "the mutual implication of all that I already brought with me in terms of ideas and projects with what was inserted there coming from her can never be clearly separated"[499] . This is an excellent warning and a good hermeneutical criterion. Balthasar is aware that the intense mutual relationship -which lasted 27 years-, at the end of the day, makes it impossible to clearly distinguish what belongs to one and what

belongs to the other. Nevertheless, he tries to make explicit some ideas that are clearly Adrienne's and that he took up in his books. We can divide the zones of influence into three. First, what interests us most here, Balthasar explains how his work of synthesis - the *Trilogy* - has been influenced by Adrienne's theology. Second, he exhibits some of Adrienne's fundamental themes that inspire several of his books. We can clearly recognize four of them. And finally, he takes a tour through a number of other books of his that have also been influenced in various ways by Adrienne's theology.

With regard to *the Trilogy*, the three parts have received an important influence from Adrienne, not in the details or in the theological erudition, but in some of the basic orientations that articulate the work. She says so in her account of *Our Task*:

> In the trilogy projected at the beginning of 1960, we begin with *Glory* (1961-1969), based on the priority of the "miracle" of being in *Truth* I [...], but from the beginning with an eye to the Johannine concept of glory as the unity of the cross and resurrection of Jesus, where the glory of the Trinitarian God shines forth in an unrepeatable and unmistakable way. Adrienne, in 1948, had summarized the mystery in a concise way: "the incarnation of the Son does not diminish his glory, on the contrary, it rather enhances it, but through his self-giving, the renunciation of his glory". [...] Many passages of Adrienne's *John* revolve around this mystery of the Trinitarian glory revealed in the destiny of Christ. This single citation, however, may suffice to demonstrate that the central Johannine gaze of my entire work is in harmony with Adrienne's writings on *John.* Certainly volumes [2 to 5...] are the fruit of my theological study, but everything leads to a theology of the cross completely in conformity with that of Adrienne [...] Adrienne, without knowing anything about aesthetics, in a brilliant little work, *The Light and the Image. Elements of Contemplation* (1955), followed the same basic project, thus offering one of the most concentrated expositions of Christian contemplation .[500]

> The second part of my trilogy, the *Theodramatica* (1973-1983) is based, in brief, first of all on the concept of mission, which elevates, by fulfilling it, the Christian-psychological concept of "role" [or "role"...], and then on the confrontation of finite created freedom with divine, infinite freedom. Mission is definitively placed here as a central concept of Christology and the following of Christ, just as it corresponds to the whole of Adrienne's Ignatian-Joanese theology; but the confrontation, speaking in extreme terms, between divine and anti-divine, demonic freedom, became dramatic-concrete in Adrienne's life, at least like that of St. Anthony the Great or the Curé of Ars... .[501]

> *Truth of the World,* volume I of *Theologica,* emerged from the conferences to the formation community for students [...] and was to be the basis for the second most important book: *Theologica. Truth of God,* where many things of Adrienne's have emerged [...] Here the theological concept of truth (Johannine, expounded by I. de la Potterie, but also always

presupposed by Adrienne) was to be developed .[502]

2. With regard now to Adrienne's central themes that are present in several of Balthasar's important books, probably the most cross-cutting is his Paschal experience of Good Friday and Holy Saturday. The understanding gained there by Adrienne is reflected, for the first time, in *The Heart of the World*[503] and then, in addition to appearing in other writings on eschatological themes, is found more extensively in *The Theology of the Three Days*[504] and in *Theodramatics* V. Another transversal theme, which is also very central to Adrienne, is the concept of *mission.* The book *Thérèse of Lisieux, History of a Mission*[505] , "would never have emerged without Adrienne's theology of mission"[506] . The theme also appears in her *Theology of History*[507] , in some articles collected in *Verbum caro*[508] and, extensively, as an "economic form of the *processio* (= procession)"[509] , at various points in *Theodramatica* III, IV and V and in *Theologica* II. With regard to the theme of *obedience,* "Adrienne had been the one who had emphasized the Christological foundation of obedience according to John and had even taken it existentially to the extreme", in the understanding that "Christ's obedience of love towards the Father in the Holy Spirit is the premise, whether for the revelation of the Trinitarian mystery of God's love, or for the redemption of the world, atoning for all disobedience of humanity". In this context Balthasar will affirm that "for me the secret center of my work on the Old Testament (in *Gloria* VI) is the chapter on the terrible obedience of the prophets (*The Scale of Obedience,* from there to that of Christ)"[510] . The theme reappears in the texts that speak about the Church and the states of life. The fourth theme - very much Adrienne's own - concerns *Mary and the Church.* "Mary at the cross (in the com-passion with the Son and in the surrender to John) becomes 'Church' (in the most intimate essence as spouse of Christ) is Adrienne's continuous doctrine"[511] . In Balthasar's many works on Mary and the Church, he tries to show the ecclesial aspect of Mary, even starting from the scene of the cross itself.

If we dwell for a moment on the topics he has mentioned and then look at Balthasar's theological formation, it is quite evident that many of these arguments have their origin and background in the long

Christian theological and ecclesial tradition, and especially in the theology and dogmatic models of the Church Fathers, which Balthasar certainly knew very well; but which, nevertheless, have received their "immediate motivation (*unmittelbare Anlass*)" - he himself acknowledges it - or from "the participation in Adrienne's existence"[512] , or with the writing and reflection of "Adrienne's scriptural commentaries"[513] - the most central part of his work -, or even from the theology itself developed by Adrienne in his works .[514]

3. Finally, Balthasar also recognizes an influence of various kinds in other works. Let us mention a few examples. The wonderful book *Contemplative Prayer*[515] , which was written to show "the biblical foundation" of prayer as "an act of listening to the divine word", is based - by Balthasar's own admission - on "Adrienne's scriptural commentaries", which were in fact a listening and contemplation of the word of God in the Bible, that is to say, a prayer[516] . The relationship *Theology and holiness,* developed in an article with that name[517] , two realities that from the 13th century onwards seem to have walked separate paths, has been prompted by the profound experience (and theology) of Adrienne who, reflecting on the life and mission of the saints, has once again recalled - and shown in her own life - the unity of the two. The successive articles on the various states of life, which culminated in the final draft of *States of Life of the Christian*[518] , are the fruit not only of Adrienne's views on this subject[519] , but also of the efforts to structure together the secular institute founded by them, "Adrienne's and [his] most important project"[520] . It seems evident, moreover, that the commentary on the *Summa Theologica,* II-II, qq. 171-182, on the charisms[521] , "had all its motivation through the experience with the charismatic Adrienne"[522] . Finally, the theme of the universality of salvation outlined in the recently mentioned book *Theology of History,* which had already been hinted at in Adrienne's concept of *mission*, reached its most finished development in the book *Love alone is worthy of faith*[523] , "whose audacious title is made tolerable only through Adrienne's Christology which overcomes all doctrine of apocatastasis"[524] . Here the aporia between, on the one hand, the Augustinian insensitivity to the

possibility of eternal damnation of a human being redeemed by Christ and, on the other hand, the easy apocatastasis solution of Origen is overcome. The overcoming is carried out starting from the Christological center of Adrienne's doctrine of Holy Saturday. This is also clear in *Theodramatic* V. *The last act,* when he refers to the "pain of God"[525] "in view of an eventual condemnation of some of his creatures"[526] .

Concluding remarks: a common, inseparable and mutually reinforcing work

We must draw some conclusions from what has been said so far. First of all, it is very clear that Balthasar explicitly recognizes how much he owes Adrienne von Speyr, and this must be taken with all due seriousness. Moreover, his biography obliges us to consider that Balthasar indeed received much from Adrienne von Speyr, from three complementary angles: (1) by having recognized, valued and "listened" to the charism revealed in her; (2) by having undertaken together the mission received, which was received as a vocational unity; (3) and by having interpreted and put into writing that impressive number of volumes with her *Theology*. All this can be recognized very well in the fact that many of the most nuclear themes of Balthasar's work were, in reality, a clear and novel initial elaboration of Adrienne; that, of course, they had a different literary form - narrative, prophetic - but with a deep theological content. Part of the original articulation of his *Trilogy,* to an important extent, comes from Adrienne's life and words.

On the other hand, we cannot forget that Balthasar was also, at the same time, very important for Adrienne. First of all, as an "ecclesiastical reference" and an instrument of confirmation of her own religious experience. For Adrienne, this meant that Balthasar gave her full confidence and she could thus be intimately open to everything she received from him, incorporating it as her own. Balthasar was the one who showed her the globality of the Catholic mystery. One can affirm with all truth that he gave her the basic coordinates that would later orient Adrienne's entire Christian life.

This has been, moreover, very normal in the confessor-penitent relationship in many cases in the history of Christianity. In this way Adrienne had the basic foundations and the minimum indispensable theological structure to be able to make her contemplation and the "revelation" received understandable and accessible, through human language, so that it could be written down by Balthasar.

Moreover, for 27 years they were in almost daily contact, even Balthasar living in the same house as her - together with his family - for the last 12 years of Adrienne's life. Therefore, the occasions of natural exchange, of formal and informal conversations, of mutual examples exchanged and all that it means to lead a "community" life, were certainly a permanent and deep mutual influence. It is clear that mutual acquaintance - when motivated by love - makes similarities.

Therefore, the most consistent conclusion that emerges from all that has been said is that, more than the influence of one on the other, where one may have influenced more than the other, in reality, what we find is a *common* development, where each one did his part, in a work that was *theological* from both perspectives, and the result was more than the sum of the two. Hence it is not strange, and it is completely understandable, that Balthasar, in spite of his enormous literary work, certainly a product -in many of its elements- of his academic formation, of his own creativity and of his brilliant intelligence; nevertheless, he himself can say that his work and Adrienne's are inseparable and that she has influenced him, more than he has influenced her; and that her work is more important than his. This is fully true in the sense that she provided him with certain nuclei -many of the most important ones- from which Balthasar elaborated his main themes, making them bear fruit in all their possibilities in contact with the great Christian tradition, which they also tried to interpret. Many of Balthasar's most fundamental and novel theological intuitions and developments are, in truth, Adrienne's, although the arrangement around the transcendentals of being is Balthasar's; but much of Adrienne was also understood by her on the basis of the structure that Balthasar himself had given her. In other words, it is effectively a work *of both of them*. Hence the obvious

corollary, although often denied or underestimated: to understand Hans Urs von Balthasar well, it is necessary to know Adrienne von Speyr as well.

Part Two

The structuring axes of his theological proposal

IV. A Fundamental Theology from a Theological Aesthetics Perspective

The theme of this chapter has already been introduced in a certain way, both in the first chapter, when we presented the *Structure of his thought,* and in the second chapter, when we presented *A Global Look at the Trilogy*. However, it is important that we treat it more closely now, not only because it is a central theme in Balthasar, but also because it is novel and a contribution to contemporary fundamental theology. Although this theme is reflected upon in a particular way in *Gloria* I and in the *Epilogue,* at the same time we must affirm that the global project of his entire *Trilogy* is a (his) proposal of fundamental theology. Balthasar's basic approach, which he summarizes at the end of the *Introduction* to *Gloria* I, is the following: the essential structure of Christianity can be described, from a doctrine of the transcendental beauty of being, as the inseparable unity between the faith of the believer and the "form" of Christ. This theological aesthetics has the capacity to include all created reality in its global proposal and, with this, it bases its credibility and veracity precisely in its integrating capacity and in its foundation in the basic structure of being[527] . That is why it is a fundamental theology.

Now, deepening a little more what has just been said, he affirms that "theological aesthetics" is a fundamental theology that also integrates in itself dogmatic theology. In fact, by proposing a theological aesthetics that unites *form* and *splendor,* Balthasar proposes the necessary unity between fundamental and dogmatic theology since, by understanding aesthetics as a doctrine of perception *and* a doctrine of ecstasy or rapture, he is precisely indicating the intrinsic unity between both aspects of theology. This is better understood if we take into account the double meaning of the concept of aesthetics used here and apply it to the experience of revelation and faith: on the one hand, it is perception (faith) and, on the other hand, it means that in a concrete event (Christ) a manifestation or revelation of God has been

discovered. This is possible only by a grace (it is the work of the Spirit) that arouses this seeing that discovers, but which is in no way independent of the event itself, since it is exactly this fact that is perceived as revelation (it is the "form" that presents itself and takes the seer by surprise), which has an objective content, and which for this very reason arouses the faith of the one who perceives it. Now, this discovery of something as revelation is necessarily, moreover, a participation in that same God who is revealing himself; because God is never an object, but precisely God-and not a thing of this world-is the foundation from which we exist and, therefore, never something alien to oneself. Hence this "seeing" that discovers the revealed can be considered, in all truth, as the doctrine of rapture, of ecstasy (it makes one feel attracted and participate in it); and, consequently, this doctrine (= that content) is authentically incorporated and is part of the doctrine of perception or of faith. One is not given without the other[528] . The revelation is captivating (= arouses faith) precisely because of its content, which is then an essential part of that same perception or faith. And that faith, as a response to revelation (= fundamental theology), is precisely the understanding of a content or form (= dogmatic theology). Therefore, Balthasar's complete proposal is a *fundamental-dogmatic theology*.

All this that we have said very succinctly deserves a more detailed explanation, to which, in fact, Balthasar has devoted the entire first volume of *Gloria*. Hence, we must now study the following aspects in order to understand this "fundamental theology from theological aesthetics": (1) what is understood by theological aesthetics and, in particular, the concept of form; then, to develop more particularly the two aspects of aesthetics: (2) faith as perception and (3) revelation/ dogmatics as form. And, finally, (4) to show why this aesthetic proposal has a greater capacity to integrate reality and, therefore, to be truer. The gradual description of all these aspects will give us, in the end, a global and clearer vision of what we could call a *fundamental* theological aesthetics.

Form in Christianity and theological aesthetics

Starting from the concept of *Gestalt* (form)-from Goethe[529] and in particular from Christian von Ehrenfels (1859-1932), precursor of the psychology of *Gestalt-*, "as an *expression* and in its demand for a vision of totality", Balthasar rearranged the Thomistic order of the transcendentals (one, true, good, beautiful), beautiful), to begin this time from "the beautiful (*pulchrum*) of being, as a miracle, and from the astonishment about it", and then to place the good (dramatic) and the true (theological) -where unity polaristically transcends the other three transcendentals- and with that order to structure his *Trilogy*[530] . In this way, he affirms that everything begins with *astonishment* before being, before the always unfathomable experience that a reality exists -that might not exist- and that it presents itself before one, that calls us and demands a response; astonishment before its *form* that appears to me and snatches me, that is to say, it arouses its attention and attracts me. All this means that the first, the most basic and fundamental thing of existence is an aesthetic reality, that is, the experience of the perception of form. Hence the chosen starting point. Let us then review the fundamental notions of a theological aesthetics, in which this concept of form is inserted, in order to understand Balthasar's proposal well.

The first thing to remember is what *aesthetics* basically is. *In broad terms,* it is the study of the contemplation and perception of the beautiful and of its attractive power, which "are inseparably linked, since no one can perceive the beautiful without being attracted, and only he who perceives it can be attracted"[531] . That is to say, it studies the perception of every form that is beautiful and its capacity of attraction. Therefore, a *theological* aesthetics, which wishes to develop "Christian theology in the light of the transcendental beauty (*pulchrum*)"[532] , will have to study those same "two moments that have determined from ancient times all aesthetics and that we could call, with Thomas Aquinas, *species* (or *forma*) and *lumen* (or *splendor*): form and splendor". Form can be understood as that *unitary totality* which gives identity to a thing, which makes it what it is and not something else, and which gives it its own characteristics. Indeed, "insofar as form, the beautiful can be grasped materially and even calculated as a

numerical relation, as harmony and law of being". But "certainly the form would not be beautiful if it were not fundamentally the announcement and manifestation of a depth and fullness that, considered in itself in an abstract way, is ungraspable and invisible"[533] . Splendor can be understood as that light that shines from within, whose rapturous force attracts us to itself. Form and splendor are therefore inseparable as aspects of beauty. For a *theological* aesthetic, then, form will be the form of Christ which, with its inner light that shines forth, arouses the faith of the one who perceives it, a faith that attracts the believer to Christ.

Now, since we are speaking of a transcendental -which is co-extensive with being-, it is not possible to understand form and splendor, that is, beauty, if we do not understand them, at the same time, within a doctrine of the totality or globality of being, since both aspects "together constitute the fundamental figure of being"[534] . Transcendentals are identified with being, so that the characteristics of a transcendental must be understood in the light of the characteristics of being, as such. Every being or *in-dividuum* (= one) is beautiful (= shows itself), good (= gives itself) and true (= says something about itself) by the very fact of being (= existing). Everything that exists cannot but be beautiful, good and true[535] . Thus, "we 'see' the form, but when we really see it, that is, when we contemplate not only the separate form but the depth that manifests itself in it, we see it as splendor, as the glory of being"[536] , as an expression of the totality of the reality to which it refers. In each thing we perceive we see not only an entity, but we also contemplate the fact that entities exist, that is, we contemplate being. An aesthetic that is now *theological* will then be an aesthetic that perceives, in the light of faith, the form of Christ, who raptures us with his splendor and, consequently, will also refer us to the depth of his reality (= to the totality of who he is, the Son) and to the underlying reality that sustains it, the Father.

Thus, from a philosophical aesthetics and a theological aesthetics, both the human person and Christianity can very well be understood as a "form". In the first place, the human being is a *totality* which, as

an expression or image (*Abbild*) of being, as a response to a creative word, is subordinated to the universal law of beauty, that is, to form and splendor. That is why it is a form: because it reflects something more than itself: it reflects the beauty of being, of existing, it reflects the truth and goodness of being someone and of existing as someone. Hence its corporeal-spiritual form "does not constitute a limit for the spirit and freedom, but identifies with them"[537] . The form leaves its imprint on the human being "and makes him free for himself and for his highest possibility". His *vital form* is what the human person "has chosen for his life and into which he melts and pours it, so that it becomes the soul of his form and the form the expression of his soul, a form not foreign to him, but so intimate that it is worth identifying with it, a form not imposed but given from the depths of being and freely chosen, not capricious, but unrepeatable and personal". The form, in short, "is its own individual law", expression of being and of the beauty it has, it is its existence as such. And to contemplate that form requires -obviously- an attitude of respect, a true act of perception, the "capacity to grasp the true", in other words, it is necessary to have eyes capable of perceiving the spiritual form[538] . Human existence is authentically a psycho-spiritual form that, as a unitary whole, expresses who that human being is in all its particularity, but also, in some way, also reflects what reality is as a totality.

On the other hand, if the human being is a form, *a fortiori* so is the Christian being. For two reasons: because Christianity is the vital form proper to a believing human being, but also because "the image of existence is radiated by the archetype of Christ and is formed by the power of the creative Spirit"[539] . It is a beautiful form or image that radiates the beauty of Christ, his archetype. But not only the individual Christian, but also divine revelation-as salvation history-also has its own beautiful form, the form as God acts. And, of course, the existence and teaching of Christ is likewise an understandable and beautiful form, which raptures from its inner reality. They are all beautiful forms, which show themselves and enrapture the one who contemplates them with eyes fit for it. If "to rapture and enrapture is

the exclusive virtue of that which has form", then "only through form can the lightning of eternal beauty be seen"[540] expressed in Christ, in the Scriptures and in his Church as a community of faith and bride of Christ. Now, the Christian form, given to the human being by the power of the Spirit and mediated by the historical forms of revelation and their transmission, does not destroy or put an end to its previous vital form, but, on the contrary, elevates it, because "grace perfects nature, it does not replace it." "In fact, the incarnation of God brings to its fullness the whole ontology and aesthetics of created being, of which it makes use by endowing it with a new depth, as a language for expressing the divine being and essence"[541] .

From what has already been said, one can easily perceive why the transcendental beauty is so functional to revelation; moreover, it is indispensable for an authentic manifestation of the glory of God in creation and for understanding it as an authentic revelation of God. This is because the form of every being-which is always beautiful-has a special interior capacity to transcend itself, to slide from the worldly domain into the supernatural. Indeed, in every worldly form, the "spirit" - the *logos* of every thing - "which radiates from within and engenders its own form," precisely in order to manifest itself and show what it wants to express with its form, must submit "to a higher configuring power"[542] , because it cannot "create" from itself since no entity is subsistent by itself. Another, with its creative power, "allows" the internal logos of each thing to express itself in a given form and to become what it is. This is the act of creation-configuration. Well then, that same "spiritual matter" - *logos* now made into a form - is also apt for a new intervention of that same higher hand - of the absolute or divine Spirit - for its own revelation; for there is a certain analogy between the formative work of God in creation (that hand which allows the *logos* of each thing to express itself in a form) and those same formative energies or *logoi* of nature and of man, fruitful also to create or express themselves always in new forms. On the other hand, while it is true that this higher hand cannot simply subordinate itself to the laws of intramundane aesthetics for its unfathomable divine revelation, nevertheless, it must necessarily use them in order to

express itself - albeit in a sovereign manner. Thus then, in those worldly forms, now become the expression of God, the evidence of his revealing presence also imposes itself immediately, through that same worldly form, which is capable of expressing the beauty and splendor that radiates from its interior and, likewise, also the glory of the God who manifests himself. This is what Balthasar has called the "aesthetic canon," the foundation of revelation and of all theological aesthetics.

This canon or aesthetic mode of revelation has its culminating point - in a supreme way - in the incarnation of the Word, where the eternal Logos has assumed flesh or human form. For Balthasar, this has been liturgically and beautifully expressed in the *Christmas Preface:* "For thanks to the mystery of the Word made flesh, the light of your glory shone before our eyes with new radiance, so that knowing God visibly, he may lead us to the love of the invisible." The text speaks of two things:

1. of the "eyes of our spirit", which, reached by a "new light" coming from God, are enabled to know *visibly* an object, which is properly "God", but God known "in a mediate way" *(thanks to...) through* the "mystery of the sacramental form" *(mystery)* of the "incarnate Word".

2. of a "rapture" *(he leads us)* provoked by this "mediating" contemplation (he leads us). This rapture leads us to a *love-eros (love)* of "the invisible", which manifests itself precisely in that patentization and revelation . [543]

Here, first of all, a *seeing* is emphasized. The fundamental act is a *per-caption* (= *to capture-fully*), that is, the "reception of a truth that offers itself"[544] , in which hearing and the act of faith are implicit, but which is first of all a perception. This perceiving requires, yes, a light - a new light - but it must spring from the very reality seen and, to a certain extent, it must be an internal part of it. That is the splendor of this mystery that offers itself. On the other hand, if we speak of seeing, it is because there is always something to know and understand (since "seeing", insofar as preception, means grasping and apprehending), even though this same mystery is also hidden, thus indicating that the human being is offered something that he is "capable of seeing, understanding, appropriating and living"[545] . It is a mystery that is truly revealed, although it is revealed *as a* mystery. From there we move on to the second point: rapture. To speak of rapture or rapture

or ecstasy of the human being when he contemplates God visibly and the *eros* or love that this implies, supposes the manifestation of the light and love of the same God who has been perceived visibly. It is a movement of the whole person, provoked by that vision that takes him out of himself and leads him to God, through Christ and moved by the Holy Spirit. Faith is more than a mere response, it is a movement and a participation in the light of God. Here the aesthetic canon has been paradigmatically defined and, therefore, the core of theological aesthetics and its theological force.

This is the core of a fundamental theological aesthetics, that is, a theology that explicitly incorporates the transcendental beauty at the center of its discourse and thus goes out to meet the aesthetic "amputations" that have occurred in Christianity. Indeed, Balthasar argues that, both in the Catholic and Protestant spheres, in different ways, the transcendental beauty has been dispensed with in order to do theology, thus practicing an amputation of the aesthetic in theology, with the corresponding impoverishment of theology itself. On the other hand, this was not the case in patristic times or during the Middle Ages. For him, in the sphere of the Protestant Reformation there has been an aesthetic amputation -which has been constant- by denying all reflection based on the God-man analogy, which -from the Reformed perspective- would lower or annul the scandal of the mystery of the cross, by converting theology into a mere function of philosophizing based on the analogy[546] . But a Catholic aesthetic amputation has also been verified, although rather in the late epoch - coming out of the great scholasticism - when a *clear* distinction between philosophy and theology was imposed. "A philosophy strictly distinct from theology can only aim at the Absolute as *principium et finis mundi* [= the cause and purpose of the world], as the limit concept of a worldly ontology, and about which only purely formal statements can be made"[547] . A theological aesthetics is not possible there either, because philosophy ceases to be "theological" since it can neither speak nor know anything about God. Therefore, it ends up being irrelevant for the strictly theological. In both cases the aesthetic amputation originates from the negation or marginalization of the

analogy God-creature, spirit-matter. Hence the importance of Balthasar's proposal, which attempts to recover an element that was basic to early Christianity and that it is indispensable to recover today, since, in a world that is not capable of contemplating and affirming beauty, the good also loses its attractive force and, in turn, truth lacks forcefulness and demonstrative capacity[548] . This is the great task that our author undertook.

Faith as subjective evidence

What in fundamental theology is the study of revelation and faith, in theological aesthetics is called the study of the perception of form and the rapture or ecstasy of love. Let us begin by reviewing the perception of form, which is another way of referring to faith, and which, from the aesthetic point of view, must be considered from two internal moments: the act of *perception* and the *experience* of that perceptive act.

The act of perception. We can describe, *roughly speaking,* four major aspects of the act of perception, which in some way represent its main characteristics as an all-encompassing act of the human being. In the first place, faith as a human act is posed as a response to the totality of existence and to the ultimate foundation of the reality of each person. It is not a partial act in the face of a marginal or dispensable reality of life, but a global act referring to the whole of existence. "In other words, the formal object of theology (and, consequently, of the act of faith) is situated at the very heart of the formal object of philosophy [...], from whose profound mystery the former is born as self-revelation of the mystery of being itself"[549] . This means that the revelation of God to which faith responds is and must be the fulfillment of the fundamental philosophical problematic, which is then carried out through a word that comes from God and is heard by the person. For, not because it is a word from God, it ceases to be a word about man himself and about his fundamental openness; on the contrary, it is precisely also a word about the human being and, therefore, that revelation is at the same time philosophy. Thus, it is not possible for the human being to assume two ultimate - juxtaposed

- attitudes, one philosophical and the other theological or religious, in the face of the foundation of life (or God). That is to say, he cannot perceive two different ultimate truths - insofar as they are ultimate - and not connected to each other about the world and about man, and have two different ultimate attitudes towards the ultimate reality. The biblical revelation necessarily takes place *in the same* formal anthropological *place* where the human being looks at the ultimate horizon of being and struggles for the meaning of the ultimate reality that gives meaning to his whole existence.

Secondly, faith, even as a subjective act, also implies a content. Three reasons justify this affirmation. If we have understood faith as the ultimate attitude of the human being, then faith determines the totality of this believing existence, "in such a way that being a Christian is simply identified with being a believer. Now, "this identification supposes that faith is not only understood as the subjective act of faith (*fides qua*), but also includes its global content (*fides quae*) to which this act is oriented and which makes it reasonable and justifies it"[550] , and which has to do precisely with the ultimate foundation of the reality of each one. In this sense, faith is an act of recognition and surrender to the foundation of everything, which implies an interior understanding - in the most evangelical sense of the word - that is, it is an act of love. 2º This also corresponds to an objective requirement, present in the act of faith, which is the interior appropriation of what is believed, that is, of the essential content of faith. It is not possible to separate the act of faith from those other elements that are vision and understanding. The three aspects are inseparable, since they are a single act in which the human being encounters God concretely. Faith leads the person to the understanding of what God truly is and, from this understanding, also to the understanding of himself as a human being. 3º And this is so because, in the last analysis, faith is directed to a totally unique object, as is God, and therefore, it must adapt itself to the characteristics of that object, which can be summarized in the fact that it reveals to us his *kabod* or *doxa* (= his divinity) that goes out to meet the believer. Therefore, that revelation does not need any other

justification outside of itself. As soon as it is perceived as a revelation of God's divinity it will be justified without the need of any other reason. That is why the act of faith is inseparable from the content of that act, because it is an act of faith in *that* content and only in that, not in another. This is a *Theo-logical* faith. Therefore faith is not only believing in Christ, but also *believing* Christ. And the latter will also continue when we reach the eternal vision .[551]

The third aspect of the act of perception is the light of the divine depth that shines in and from the form, in which that very act of faith is sustained and affirmed. Indeed, it is true that faith is supported by the signs of credibility delivered by that which is being revealed, but it is also necessarily sustained by the light of the grace that secretly infuses that same God who reveals himself from the form he has assumed. But, as we have already said, the two things cannot be understood as juxtaposed or independent of each other; which is only possible if we contemplate the reality of faith from aesthetic categories. This is where the importance of theological aesthetics for a fundamental theology is manifested in full force.

> The beautiful is, above all, a *form,* and the light does not strike this form from above and from without, but bursts in from within. In beauty, *species* and *lumen* are one and the same thing, if we stick to what the word *species* really means (which does not only designate any form, but the pleasant and radiant form). The visible form not only "refers" to a profound and invisible mystery. It is also its manifestation; it reveals it at the same time as it veils it. As a natural or artistic form, it possesses an exterior that manifests itself and an interior depth, but both aspects are inseparable from each other. The content is not behind the form, but in it. He who is not able to see and understand the form, the content also escapes him .[552]

In other words, every act of knowledge - as is also faith - necessarily entails an aesthetic moment, since the contemplation of something beautiful implies the renunciation of a consuming and dominating gaze, in order to assume a receptive attitude, which allows itself to be touched by what is contemplated; which is clearly a natural prefiguration of the attitude of faith in the face of revelation. This can be seen concretely realized in the incarnate Word, in whom we find an authentic *legible* form - "and not just a sign or an accumulation of signs"[553] -, which is perceived in its authentic truth and welcomed as the appearance of a divine depth that surpasses all worldly nature.

Thus then, the act of faith is an authentic aesthetic experience, since it is based on the perception of that inner light that shines from the form of Christ and manifests that divine depth that is being revealed. Light that gives credibility to the form in which it is manifested and that sustains the act of faith in it.

Finally, the fourth aspect of the act of perception is its character as a response to the witness that God gives of himself. That witness is twofold: exterior and interior. It is an exterior witness in Christ, in his flesh and his historical condition; but it is also "interior to the believer himself" and this interior witness "is identified with his faith" insofar as "faith is the light of God that shines in man". It is what has been called *lumen fidei* (= light of faith), which is the "light in which we believe God and which constitutes the intimate foundation (*causa, motivum, fundamentum*) of our faith"[554] . But as we have already mentioned, this witness to God, which shines with the light of faith in the human being, arises, in turn, from the very form of revelation, that is, from the external witness, which is concretized in two essential ways . On the one hand, in the light of being that shines in every being and that refers to the ultimate mystery of existence: why does every being exist, why is it as it is, why does it reveal itself to us as light, goodness, beauty? If this light of being comes to us, then through it also comes the supreme light of God, the ultimate depth and foundation of being; and this God can then also appear in new forms in the entities that are open to the light of being and to its foundation. Therefore, on the other hand, the world and its history can also be chosen by God to be the instrument through which he himself reveals to the world his inner fullness as the history of salvation.

Consequently, from the signs of a supernatural revelation existing in history, the human spirit receives the ability to see the points of convergence and make them comprehensible, in such a way that "the inner light of faith and historical revelation meet, recognize and reinforce each other"[555] . And the moment arrives in which "the interior light of the 'eyes of faith' becomes one with the exterior light that shines in Christ, because what in man aspires and seeks God is

appeased by the form of the revelation of the Son"[556] . Here is verified that immense mystery that is given in the fact that, through love for a concrete entity, the human being can unite himself to the love of the absolute Being, who has manifested himself to us through that entity that is the man Christ and whom we love. In conclusion, "the whole mystery of Christianity, what radically distinguishes it from any other religious project, consists in the fact that the form, precisely because it has been placed and affirmed by God, is not in opposition to the infinite light," be it the light of faith or the light of being. Christianity thus becomes "the superabundant and unsurpassable principle of all aesthetics"[557] and is therefore the aesthetic religion par excellence. Hence aesthetics is properly a fundamental theology in its full sense.

Experience of faith. As we have seen, faith is an act of perception, but it is also an "encounter of man, in his integral being, with God"[558] . Therefore, the response to that encounter has to be - equally - of the whole man and has to be characterized, consequently, as an *experience*. Three aspects are involved here: it is an experience of obedience; an experience that follows the Christ archetype; and an experience that involves sensitivity.

Theologically, the model of faith can only be Jesus Christ himself in his following of the Father's will. In fact, faith is an act of response of the *whole human person* to the revelation of God, who allows himself to be completely transformed by the God who calls him. For the beautiful always attracts and "asks" for a transformation of one's own space in order to give an internal welcome to that same beautiful thing that is manifesting itself. But it is not a completely autonomous response, but must correspond to the exemplary archetype of the human being, which is Christ; and this is done precisely by following Christ, the model. Now then, "if faith is the attunement of one's whole existence to God and adaptation to him, it can also be called obedience, and in fact it is"[559] . But here a question may arise: do not obedience with respect to a rapture of beauty seem contradictory to each other? And, however, they are not, since just as works of art have their own internal laws that make them beautiful and these laws are neither external nor imposed from the outside, but are articulated

from their own internal reality; so too the human being is articulated from within when he is following the laws of his own archetype -which has created him-, precisely because as an archetype he is the most interior thing he possesses. Obedience is something internal -proper to beauty- only when it is obedience to one's own archetype.

The consequences of this first characteristic of the experience of faith understood as obedience are twofold. In the first place, this means a gradual path of growth of one's own existence within the existence of Christ, who is the foundation of every human being, and who is also the one who is realizing at every moment the conformation of us to himself. Thus, to the extent that the Christian abandons himself to that faith and experiences it as just, he begins to find in that same experience a new certainty that we can understand as his own Christian experience. "Christian existence is *demonstrated* and accredited as a 'true and authentic' existence precisely because it is an existence in faith, that is, in surrender to him who has given himself for us"[560] . The second consequence is that both the believer's response to God and his gradual conformation to the form of Christ through the work of God involve the totality of the human being. Now, "this totalizing encounter, which surpasses and grounds the singular act of surrender, proper to faith, hope and love, in the totality of subject and object, allows and requires us to speak of Christian harmonization"[561] . This means that faith is not an addition to the human being, but is *harmonized* from the central point of the human totality, which is the place where all its faculties are rooted in the unity of its substantial form, in such a way that this concept of harmony encompasses the aesthetic and the theological. Indeed, man, insofar as totality, harmonizes with the whole of reality through all his faculties; he is a kind of consensus with the whole of reality. And this is repeated in the believer starting from revelation and the work of the Spirit, harmonizing himself with the Word made flesh. But, on the other hand, "this attunement, this harmonization with God is not immediate, but mediate, and it is so in two different ways, because man does not contemplate God immediately, but through the *medium* of his intentional human acts, and because God has made use of creation to

express himself by becoming man"[562] . It is therefore an obedience as consensus/harmony, through the believer's own experience.

The experience of faith is also an archetypal experience, that is, faith follows a model. This is the second aspect of faith as experience. God, who is invisible, nevertheless, for his manifestation and revelation, assumes precisely the worldly and creatural visibility, in such a way that he who has no form, takes the form of the world and, in this way, can be encountered by the human being, in the human way. On the other hand, the revelation of God throughout the world and throughout history has been homogeneous -without contradictions-, because God is homogeneous in his actions, and each new revelation does not annul the previous one, but gradually brings to fulfillment what was promised. In this sense, although Christ is the fullness of revelation and the center of everything, he does not render useless or meaningless everything that came before and everything else, but on the contrary, he becomes the exemplary *archetype* for all, being precisely the culmination of everything, because he was also the origin of everything. Thus Christ brings to fulfillment every form of the world and the whole history of revelation; and in him everything is synthesized because he is the archetype of everything. The incarnation of God is then the measure of everything. "Taking into account this inclusion, that fragment of world and history is archetypically exemplary for the history of the Church, that is, unstoppably participatory, exemplary, unequaled and unsurpassable"[563] . Consequently, "the sense of archetypal experience is always inclusive"[564] . This means that the apostles, the Church and the community will always refer to the archetype and will also be transformed into a certain archetype, but which will always refer to the first and fundamental one. All this makes us discover the inescapably sensitive and concrete aspect of the experience of faith when it comes to looking at and adapting to its archetype.

And this is the third aspect: the sensibility of the act of faith. This presupposes three fundamental affirmations: 1º In the Scriptures we constantly see that the perception of God is sensible and objective, since the invisible God, in a free and gratuitous way, has made himself

visible in Jesus Christ, the unique model. 2º This biblical perception of God is never spiritualizable because "that which we have seen and heard" (1 Jn 1:3) - as figure and word - remains forever and that is what we transmit. 3º This biblical experience of God refers back to, and at the same time anticipates, the eschatological experience of God which, in an analogous way, will also be a visible perception. The flesh of Christ has become definitive and unsurpassable. Hence, not only Christ alone is archetypal, but so are, in their own way, both Mary and the Church, since they are vital *believing* forms, relative to the one archetype. All this leads us to what the long tradition of the Church has called "spiritual senses," where their apparently paradoxical, even dialectical character is resolved if we understand them from the point of view of aesthetics, which understands faith as *perception, that* is, as vision (= it is a "sense"). Balthasar affirms:

> The perception of faith, as an act of encounter of the whole person, not only necessarily includes sensitivity, but accentuates it, because, if only through the senses does man perceive and feel the reality of the world and of being, the Christian God manifests himself to him precisely in the midst of worldly reality. Therefore, the center of the encounter must be where the profane human senses, making the act of faith possible, become "spiritual," and faith, in order to be human, becomes "sensitive"[565] .

Here there is no contradiction since the archetypal faith experiences that we can appreciate in the biblical realm "demonstrate the opposite, and their archetypal character demands without further ado the extension of their relevance to the Christian faith"[566] . Indeed, the solution to this paradox lies in the fact that we are talking about a "spiritual" *sensibility,* which tells us that there is something like what the Christian tradition -from Origen onwards - has called "spiritual senses". They are an attempt - with greater or lesser success - to find the fundamental and complete meaning of the biblical experience of faith, insofar as "perception" of a form, which is "experienced" in and with the whole believing being, and which lets us glimpse a light that shines in that form and from it manifests the glory or divinity of the invisible God. What is important here is not the concept used, but the reality to which it points.

With this we have completed the subjective aspect of faith as perception and experience.

The form of Christ as objective manifestation

Having reviewed the act of perception, we must complement this with the study of the "form" of Christ, as the objective manifestation of God, which is precisely what is perceived by the faith of the believer, because the act of perception is inseparable from the object perceived. In fact, "the subjective experiential capacity finds its raison d'être and its justification in an experiential object and cannot be demonstrated and understood in its integrality apart from this object"[567] . This also implies that studying the perceived object will not only allow us to understand the object itself, but will also allow us to go even deeper into the comprehensibility of the act of perception itself, which without an object would not exist as such. For this reason, when we now refer to objective evidence -or form-, themes that we have already seen when dealing with subjective evidence will reappear. But this is normal -and even necessary-, since we are talking about a single act with two inseparable aspects. Incidentally, this is something that will happen again in what follows in the text, since in a theology that is based on the transcendentals of being, which interpenetrate one another, it is not possible to make too clear-cut distinctions.

Balthasar describes the *form* of Christ from five complementary points of view.

Necessity of an objective form of disclosure

The first -and prior- question is why revelation must have an objective form. Is a "form" of revelation necessary? Balthasar gives three mutually intertwining reasons. Every self-manifestation of God is essentially a *communication* between God and man and, therefore, even if it is the most intimate communication possible, it must possess some *form;* which is indispensable for the human being because otherwise he would not be able to encounter God, because he would simply not perceive him (*per-capere* = *capture-completely*). Even if we speak of "experiences, feelings, illuminations, which as such are not the God who manifests himself"[568] , they are precisely what permit communication and, therefore, are equally indispensable, as forms of revelation that permit perception and encounter. 2º Creation, as the

work of God, is at the same time the manifestation of God in the *form* of the world. Indeed, through the existence of the world, God manifests himself as such -God truly-, although from a particular point of view, that is, from his "glory" or "sublimity". In fact, this glory radiates through the form of the world as its splendor - or light from the depths - and thus can be perceived by the human being. Now it is equally clear that this mode of revelation in the being of creation is a function of the future revelation in Christ, since it prepares it and makes it possible because it is the capacity possessed by the created being, both of transcendence of itself, and of reflection of what is beyond itself (being and its foundation). 3º But "only in the divinity of Christ, that is, in the relationship of his two natures and in his relationship with the Father in the Holy Spirit is the proper and intimate form of Christian revelation manifested"[569] . Only in the incarnation of the Word, God himself and in himself has become visible and experiential. In him the eternal archetype (Logos) and the created image (humanity) have been united, therefore, this form is unique and unrepeatable. In short, these three reasons recognize that the created being needs a harmonious form endowed with meaning in order to meet all others in it and from it. Therefore, God cannot not assume - albeit in the freest way - a concrete form to meet the human being. Evidently behind this is the *analogia entis* between God and creature, although the form assumed by Jesus will never be a simple particular case of the general, but something always completely unique.

The form of the revelation

Since it is indispensable that some "form" originates for there to be revelation, the second aspect - when describing that form - is to delineate that more specific characteristic that defines it, given that it is an articulation between the Absolute and the created. And since it is also an authentic *relationship,* even if it is between *dissimilarities,* it must be characterized by two aspects: an analogy between the parts and, at the same time, a greater dissimilarity or concealment in the manifestation itself. As for the first aspect - analogy - we have said that there is an indissoluble unity between the perception of form and

faith, precisely because we are faced with "a unity of objective revelation that demands and conditions it". This unity of revelation, as a unique unrepeatable event, is due to the fact that the one who reveals himself is God, and since God is unique, "he can only express himself in his ultimate totality and depth in an unrepeatable way". Jesus is then the summit of all God's revelation in creation and in history because he is precisely "the unity of the eternal Son and temporal man"[570] , and this is what arouses faith and unconditional acceptance of his Word. Now then,

> What is decisive is that in his splendor-form there is no separation or distinction between what Christ is as God and what he is as man. It is only clear that, as man, he can be the radiant imprint of God only to the extent that, as God, he is essentially equal to the Father, and that his eternal glory only becomes comprehensible to us insofar as he receives it as man and is invested with it . [571]

The first aspect of the distinctive form of revelation has thus become clear: it consists in the unique unity between God and the creature, which is possible only through the initiative of God who has willed to draw near to the human being. But this presupposes that the creature has been created as the image of God, in such a way that, on the one hand, God can become a creature in order to meet man and, on the other hand, man is able to see God in the creature, starting from the transcendence proper to the creature, that is, from his (aesthetic) characteristic of being beautiful. Philosophically this is called *analogia entis* and theologically it is based on the *hypostatic union.* Now, all this is possible only because God is Trinity, that is, because in God there is an "other" (= the Son) and because in God there is also a *self-emptying* towards the other (= the generation of the Word and the acceptance - by the Son himself - of being generated), in other words, because God is love.

Assuming in God this power and will to manifest himself to his creature, it is now necessary to affirm a second aspect or characteristic of the form of revelation: it is a revelation that is always given - at the same time - in concealment. This is already evident from the fact that God is transcendent, that he is totally distinct from everything created and that, therefore, his essence is always beyond all that we can think or perceive. But this revelation is also given in concealment because in

its very revelation - in a concrete corporeal-spiritual form - it has to overcome, as a created form, three tensions that are proper to worldly reality:

> Firstly, the intramundane tension between the manifest condition of the body and the hidden condition of the spirit; secondly, the tension founded in creation between the cosmos as the image and expression of a free God, not in need of any creation, and God himself; and thirdly, the tension in the order of grace and salvation, between the sinner who has turned away from God and the God who reveals himself by redeeming him through the concealment of the cross .[572]

Indeed, the revelation of God takes place on the basis of this manifestation-hiding polarity precisely as a way of overcoming - in a higher way - the same three tensions mentioned above, but without the need to suppress them in the created human reality.

With respect to the tension between body and spirit, when at the beginning of this chapter we referred to the revelation of being, we saw how this overcoming was carried out. The mystery of beauty was born precisely from that paradox between the external manifestation in the material (the form) and the interiority that is expressed in it (the splendor). "Indeed, what is manifested is that which, in its manifestation, at the same time remains hidden"[573] . Every reality that shows itself - from the inanimate to the human - does not do so in such a way that it loses all of its own, but somehow retains an intimacy that is unfathomable to anyone else, which is its remaining always hidden and as a mystery unfathomable to the other (= its individuality). But none of this prevents that which is manifested, from really manifesting itself and manifesting what it truly is; and without for that reason being diluted in the manifestation, exhausting its mystery. This is the fundamental theme of philosophy. This is also the aesthetic foundation of all reality: the fact that the being is not lost with its manifestation. We will even see that this reality of manifestation-concealment, proper to being, finds its ultimate comprehensibility precisely in the God who reveals himself by concealing himself ever more.

The second tension is between the cosmos, as the expression of a free God who has no need of it, and God himself. Here it is, on the one hand, that creation itself shows that it cannot be necessary, which

implies that it has been created freely and by a completely sovereign decision of God. And from there arises this second tension: if creation is a completely free work on the part of its Maker, then it is not possible to deduce-from itself-why we have been created; and that is what produces, together with its manifestation in creation, that most profound concealment of the mystery of God: who he is and why he acts as he does. This implies, on the other hand, that a natural theology can make sense, insofar as it alludes to a creative and foundational God, but only if it then leads to an even deeper apophatic theology, which maintains God as a mystery, in the strict sense. Indeed, "the human intellect knows God implicitly in every act of knowledge, and therefore also loves him with natural love in an implicit way (Thomas, *De Ver.,* 22, 2c and ad 1). This 'being-implicit' of God is nothing other than God's way of revealing himself in the creature. As he reveals himself, his concealment is greater"[574] . We are again in the *analogia entis,* where the mystery of God is revealed in the creature, but in a way that always invites us to transcend it, since it is revealed in an ever greater concealment. Now, this tension has its highest path of overcoming - but without losing the polarity itself - precisely in the particular characteristic of "non-evidence" that accompanies the Christian faith; because this faith, although it reveals the "evidence" proper to the Creator, who reveals himself in a veiled way as the beginning and end of all the ways of the world, by making himself present in his Word made flesh, does not for that reason cease to be the immeasurable and unfathomable God, and reveals himself precisely as such: *Si comprehendis non est Deus* (St. Augustine) (= if you understand, that is not God).

The third tension (between God the Savior and the graced sinner), which refers to the revelation of God in the flesh, explains and gives its ultimate understanding to the two previous ones. The revelation of grace, with respect to the revelation of creation, is not a new - non-worldly - form within the created world, "but a new modality of God's presence in the form of the world, a more intimate union with it, to which the Son of God is given access and in which he participates"[575] . It is now a matter of *God himself* making himself present to his

creature, through his created image, and pronouncing a definitive word. It is an internal word which, despite having become external as a result of sin, does not replace God's original plan, but on the contrary fulfills it superabundantly. Now, evidently, the Word of God made human word, besides being the culmination of its explicit manifestation, is at the same time a greater concealment, because God is "God, and not man" (Hos 11:9). Thus, when the incarnation of the Word succeeds the words of creation, revelation reaches its highest level, but at the same time, the process of concealment also reaches its deepest level. And it must also necessarily be a process of concealment because it is the translation of God's absolutely unique and sovereign being into the humblest everydayness of a normal human life. And this is possible only because God is also the creator, who leaves his imprint on creation, *and* because he is the foundation of all being and is not just another entity. Therefore, in this concrete entity that is Jesus, the infinite and absolute being can make himself present and express himself. Precisely because God is Non-Other, he can become a concrete "other" without ceasing to be the Totally Other. For this reason he can also assume the form of "sinful flesh" (Rom 8:3), of a formless face (Is 52:14) and of abandonment on the cross (Mk 15:34); and he can give an absolute value to these (infra)-human forms of life. All this is possible because God always manifests himself in what is different from him and, therefore, assuming an ever greater dissimilarity. Hence, finally, the incomprehensibility of God does not stem from a lack of intelligence on our part, but is "a positive divine quality that determines the knowledge proper to faith"[576] , whose incomprehensibility will not disappear even in the face-to-face vision in eternity. That is why all revelation is at the same time concealment. And so we can now understand that this third tension is what gives it its authentic and explicit content, and explains the first two: since God is incomprehensible in his very mystical reality and will always be so, both his manifestation in being and the absolutely mysterious reason why things exist are only forms derived from the unfathomable mystery of the ever greater God, who nevertheless wanted to create and communicate in love with what is distinct from him. This, then, is

the distinctive characteristic of the form of revelation in Christ.

Christ is the center of the form of revelation

Here we are at the nuclear point of the subject. The necessity of a form and the characteristics that this form possesses for the revelation of God were only introductory aspects for a better understanding of the one thing that is central: Christ as manifestation of the Father. Balthasar develops this Christological core (a kind of fundamental Christology) on the basis of three basic criteria. In the first place, its *plausibility:*

> The expression "center of the form of revelation" [...] refers rather to that by which the form as a whole acquires coherence and becomes comprehensible, that is, its why, to which all the particular aspects must be referred in order to be understood. The fact that Christ is this center (and not simply the beginning, the initiator of a historical form that would later develop autonomously) is rooted in the peculiarity of the Christian religion and in its specific character, which distinguishes it from all other religions .[577]

Accordingly, the plausibility of Christianity, of the Church, or of any other Christian expression, depends entirely on the plausibility of Christ. Indeed, to sustain an institution and a religion such as Christianity, one needs a truly solid foundation, which can show not only subjective but also objective evidence. "It has to be an evidence that jumps out and shines from the phenomenon itself, not an evidence that simply responds to the needs of the subject"[578] . And this is precisely what happens with Christ: what he really is is born from himself and manifests itself from himself; it does not depend on other conditions of the subjects. Indeed, in Christ there dwells a decisive light under a double aspect: insofar as the form that Christ makes transparent possesses in itself an authenticity and an intrinsic evidence; "and insofar as this authenticity, inherent in the thing itself, also has the power to radiate from itself to the man who tries to understand it; irradiation that is not merely intellectual, but that transforms the whole of existence"[579] . That is the unique and irrevocable foundation of all its plausibility, so that every other element in Christ will be plausible only within the totality of this image or form of this one Christ .[580]

Secondly, Christ must be the *measure and form* of everything else, not

the other way around. The understanding of Christ cannot be assembled - authentically - from the outside, with criteria external to himself. This means that, although normally "the form can only be composed of parts or pro-portional aspects *(pro-portio),* whose measure is not in the last analysis the parts themselves but the totality, which is the definitive distributor and beneficiary of its own measure" and that therefore "others can be applied to this form as a measure"; nevertheless, "if one wants to speak of measure and form in Christ, it is not possible to adopt an external measure with which to measure it from the outside. If he is the 'one', no generic and external measure will measure him and he can only measure himself"[581] and all the aspects and parts of himself will be mutually commensurable and will harmonize with each other from that unity-totality which is Christ himself. This means then, as we have said, that Christ himself is the measure of all other things, which is not an impediment so that, in a second moment, one can also ask about his relationship with the other measures of the world.

Thus, from this internal unity we must read the perfect harmony between his "mission" and his "existence", that is, the harmony between the will of the Father and his perfect human obedience. All this implies that, in Christ, in what constitutes his mission, there is a perfect proportion between the divine and the human, and that this is essentially identified with his person as Son, as one sent. Thus, in the life of Jesus two movements intertwine: "the 'descent' of God into the 'flesh' and the 'ascent' of the flesh to the spirit"[582] . This, which can only be discovered starting from Christ himself and can only be conceived starting from his revelation, reveals to us the authentic relationship between God and the human being, and indirectly speaks of what God is like and what the human being is like. In turn, that the Word becomes flesh means that the whole human being is now transformed into the language of God - with all his human existence - and is a word obedient to God. It is, in the end, an exhaustive taking of position of the human being by God and, as such, it is a full adaptation of man to the measure of God, although all this is subjected to the historical journey of Jesus who, far from diminishing

perfection, brings it in his own dynamism to its ultimate fullness. Now, "this ascending and descending measurement can indeed be called form and figure," since its internal harmony and proportion between God and the human being elevates it to the archetype of the beautiful. "Indeed, this beauty is revelation, beauty of God that manifests itself in man and beauty of man that is found in God and only in him"[583] , beauty that unifies God and man. For this reason it can be called the measure and horizon of everything, because in its perfect harmony between the divine and the human it expresses the perfect archetype of all that is human and, therefore, the measure of all creation.

The third criterion is the *capacity* one must possess to be able to grasp the *qualitative dimension* of this form, which makes it the incomparable center of everything and proof of its own authenticity and evidence:

> That the measure that Christ represents and personifies is qualitatively different from any other is something that needs no demonstration, since it is clearly perceptible in the phenomenon itself. Certainly, to perceive it requires a "capacity to see the qualitative" [... which], in essence, is bestowed by the phenomenon itself, which, being unique in its species, cannot be recognized in its intimate condition through comparisons with others. The objective light that dwells in it, its objective and irradiating justice, must leap into view as the grace of faith, for the subject who encounters it. The enlightened subject will then recognize (and increasingly better) to what extent the light emanates from the object and dwells in it, and in the light of the object will learn to distinguish it from all others .[584]

That light that allows to capture the objective quality of the form and its evidence is born from some characteristics of that same form and that accredit its legitimacy[585] . As a previous element, the form must show its truth in the fact of not doing violence. In fact, its proportions and the form's own harmony are perceived, but it always leaves the one who perceives it free and does not violate him with its attraction, but only opens itself to be freely accepted by the other. This is, however, only a necessary but not sufficient condition, in which the following three characteristics are affirmed, which are properly those that are the basis of its evidence: 1º The evidence of the form is verified in the very existence of the one who perceives it by showing all its strength and energy in the fact that it vitalizes the believer. Here we can speak of the unity between image and force, between

form and *dynamis*. 2º Although the uniqueness of Christ and of his form are a requirement for the understanding of the word of God (even under all its historical conditionings), nevertheless, this uniqueness is visible only to the believing eye that discovers that here the Word really became flesh and, therefore, its uniqueness must be accepted, even if it cannot be scientifically proven. With this, "Christ appears not as relatively unique", "but as qualitatively distinct, as absolutely unique, who on the basis of his own form refers to himself, as to his center, the relative uniqueness of the others, as do all the images of the world, to whatever sphere they belong"[586] . 3º Therefore the eventuality of the form not being received is simply because it did not reach to be seen in what it really was, since "he who is capable of seeing understands perfectly well, on the one hand, that the objective evidence of this form does not exclude the possibility nor the reality of the scandal, but, on the contrary, necessarily demands it; and, on the other hand, he can also demonstrate his reason for it"[587] . In synthesis, the form shines with the light arising from itself, and that same light enables the one who perceives it to grasp its evidence, in as a unique and evident form by itself, which attracts but does not violate with its intrinsic force.

The two aspects or characteristics that we will now develop are in some way an extension of what we have just said about these three basic criteria of the Christological nucleus of the form of Christ, so that with it they form part of that same nucleus.

Mediation of the form

The fourth characteristic - or point of view - is the fact that this unique and unrepeatable form is imprinted in a particular historical event - a concrete historical human existence - in such a way that the uniqueness of the form of Christ, which qualitatively makes it unsurpassable, is at the same time a limited and finite worldly form, which has been inserted in history in a historically given context and in culturally determined forms. This necessarily implies that this unique form must be discovered on the basis of its concrete mediations in history, and in particular, of the events of his life in the light of the testimonies that he has left us of those same events.

Indeed, "we can only see what *he is* from what *he does*". Now, what he has done - and continues to do - we can know only through the various witnesses who transmit this testimony to us. So - and this is very important - the testimony *about* Christ is part "of what *is*" the form of him. "This witness is not, as one might think, merely external or additional. It belongs to the very structure of the form"[588] . Thus, for example, the witness that - biblically - the Father gives about his Son, is internal to what that Son is; the witness that the Spirit offers about Jesus is internal to the reality of Jesus; the same can be said of the prophecies and the cosmos (= signs), which speak with their own language about Christ.

Now, all the testimonies speak of an existing man, that is, of a life in progress, which acts and which, by happening, manifests its true figure. Thus this unique figure unfolds in a vital multiplicity that then reaches us through Scripture and the witnessing community, where both form but a single witnessing reality: Scripture and Church - two aspects of the same reality - that actualize the presence of Christ. In this way, the Church-as listening to and celebrating the Word-is not only the result of the following of Christ but, above all, it is an event and an aspect of the power *-dynamis-* of the "form" of Christ that is manifested today. The process of this configuration is very important here: the Church comes about thanks to the presence of the Lord, to whom she witnesses and who makes himself present in communion, but precisely and to the extent that the Church communicates this form of Christ, she realizes herself as the mediation of Christ and builds her own form as *part* of this same form of Christ, even if she remains provisional and in tension with the eschatological.

From the foregoing it can be very clearly deduced that the various testimonial forms of the life of Christ are thus transformed in some way into an integral part of that same form of Christ. On the one hand, Scripture, as the word of God addressed to the Church and the expression of the community's reflection of faith, insofar as it is the light that falls on Christ and acts within the Church, itself belongs to the form of Christ and is an expression of his fullness. And also the Church, as the result of the work of the risen Christ through Scripture

and sacrament, her whole essence is to be the Body and Bride of Christ, and therefore she cannot attribute to herself a form of her own, even if she herself is distinguished from Christ, but has everything from him and is understood only from him, in such a way that she also belongs to the same form of Christ. From this we also deduce very practical consequences that must never be forgotten: Scripture possesses its form only insofar as it indicates and witnesses to the form of God's revelation, whose center of gravity is Christological. Therefore, its reading and interpretation must always be from the Holy Spirit, and the theologian in his interpretation must try to attain this same beautiful form for his theology. The Church also possesses its own form, but it is only that which is relative and indicative of the only principal form of revelation: Christ. This does not detract from its institutional aspect, with its limitations and particularities, which are expressed in Eucharistic worship, in all its sacramental form, in faith and dogma, in preaching and other ecclesial forms. But all of them are valid and understood only insofar as they express and are relative to the one form of Christ.

In conclusion, in Balthasar's words, "Sacred Scripture and the Holy Church together constitute, in their capacity to express Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit" and "are indispensable for the understanding of the fundamental form"[589] . But only insofar as Christ prevails in them - even against human work - because they are a work of God, is it possible that, together with the fundamental form, they contribute to form an "overall form" in which the structure of that fundamental form is manifested. In any case, that "fundamental form" is drawn more strongly in Scripture - due to inspiration - than in the Church - in which its structures are exposed to human abuse - in such a way that its indefectibility is guaranteed rather in a negative way, as a protection against ultimate betrayal. Finally, "the vision of the form of Christ through the mediation of Scripture and the Church is a revelation that objectively refers beyond itself"[590] , such that "Scripture and the Church are means whose form is inexplicable without this objective ecstasy, without this objective enthusiasm" that makes present the form of Christ and snatches the human being towards

Christ. That is, they are impossible and incomprehensible without the light of faith. "It is what the Fathers [of the Church] called *admirabile commercium et conubium*" (= admirable exchange and union) .[591]

The testimony of the form

This last characteristic is united and could form part of the previous one because the mediation of the form and the witness of the form are, in reality, a global unity under *the fundamental witness of the Holy Spirit.* Indeed:

> The form of Jesus is not witnessed from without, but from within, that is to say, it is the witness that first and foremost constitutes it as the form that it is, namely, as the manifestation of God, the Word of God, the testimony of God about himself .[592]

The essential and articulating element of the form of Christ is his being a manifestation of the Father, and this is only perceived because the Father gives his testimony from the very form of Christ. In the text just quoted, Balthasar speaks of the testimony of the Father in two basic senses. 1st "The testimony of the Father constitutes the form (εἶδος) of the Son as such, that of the Spirit constitutes his glory (δόξα)"[593] . Thus "the Son, in the testimony given by the Father and in the testimony he gives of the Father, appears as the *eidos,* the form of God, and, consequently, as the aesthetic model of all beauty"[594] . 2º But the Son is also a witness of the Father insofar as he shows the relationship between the one who sends and the one who is sent, and thus the divine nature is revealed as love. Indeed, every appearance or manifestation necessarily refers back to a foundation, which is the one who appears, and in the case of Christ, that foundation is the Father, of whom Christ is his manifestation. Thus, the Son, by his obedience, shows who the Father is, but, at the same time, by this, the Father shows the divinity of his Son, precisely because of the mutual relationship that becomes evident. Here then - by the two senses mentioned - it is clearly seen that testimony and form constitute one and the same thing, because the form internally comprises the relationship with the Father, as the core of its content. Therefore, in this case, testimony and form cannot exist one without the other.

But history and the cosmos, in their own way, also bear witness to the form of Christ. The history of salvation-as promise and prophecy-

witnesses that the manifestation of God in Christ assumes the whole mythology of the world and surpasses it, responding in a deeper way to its fundamental questions and pointing to Christ as the synthesis and full unity of every previous word and action carried out in the old covenant[595] . And it also shows how the world and its history are a suitable *medium* in which God can "inscribe his personal self-revelation"[596] and make himself visible, thus showing what man and the world mean for God, showing the destiny of the world and of man before God and, in this way, also showing clearly what God himself means for the world. All this is a testimony of history about God that shapes the form of Christ, the witness of this[597] . And the cosmos, which from its very creation has been thought in terms of Christ (Col 1:16), testifies to the "subjection of matter to accept and express the saving signs of grace (σημεῖα) and to allow itself to be penetrated bodily by God"[598] .

These are the five structuring characteristics of the unique form of Christ, which raptures with its light and allows that form to be perceived as the manifestation of the Father. It is an appearance of the Father's depth, which does not exhaust his mystery, but rather makes it explicit even more so, by making himself present in his eternal Son. This form, in its evidence, is revealed by itself, insofar as it is plausible and of a superior quality, the core of which is its quality of witness to the Father, expressed through the mediations of a historical life. This is what is essential and proper to Christianity, which makes it unique, and, therefore, its own credibility can only be sustained in itself.

A theological aesthetics with integrative capacity

If we have spoken of a "fundamental theological aesthetics" it is because being Christian is one possibility among many others and, therefore, it must show its credibility by justifying why to be Christian and not something else. At the end of his entire work, in the *Epilogue,* Balthasar confronts this theme in a "kind of - these are his words - apologetics"[599] . Without pretending here to make a complete summary, it is important at least to show his argumentation, developed from the criterion of *integration* and the existence of the

other in God. And that is exactly what his fundamental theological aesthetics has aimed at: to show the plausibility of Christianity and the adequacy of its claim. The argument follows three steps.

The first step presents the criterion of *integration*. Since there are many truth claims and since many truths can also be perceived on various hierarchical scales, the only way to coordinate all these is on the principle that "he who sees more truth is more profoundly right", "which corresponds to the ancient Christian doctrine of the '*logoi spermatikoi*', which are widespread throughout humanity"[600] . This means that the less broad views would have to be integrated into the more encompassing ones, so that those views that manage to embrace and integrate the greatest number of things and possibilities, are the ones that can boast of being more true. However, this criterion of integration must be well understood. It is not a kind of "absolute knowledge" in the manner of Hegel[601] , which would integrate everything - including Christianity - into a human knowledge, because that would leave out the freedom of God to carry out his revelation; something that is essential if we want to understand God as love that gives itself freely and, furthermore, to understand the free revelation of God as not deducible by reason. Therefore, the criterion of integration needs to be based both on integrating reason and on the freedom of God. This, moreover, is in harmony with an essential paradox of Christianity: the human being possesses a nature made to reach God, but this goal, at the same time, is unattainable by human forces alone. Therefore, a divine grace is necessary that is already grafted onto human freedom and that opens itself to us, historically, from what we could call a Christological center. In this way, the criterion of integration must respect both the integrating reason and the freedom of God, offered as a grace of help to human freedom.

The second step has to do with the answer that the various religions have given to the *fundamental question of "salvation"*, independently of what, for the moment, we can consider by that word. What philosophy has posed, that is, "the question of the foundation, of being, of the meaning and purpose of existence in general"[602] , is also addressed by religions, either more explicitly or much more implicitly,

as basic questions of human existence. Indeed, even if this question is not posed explicitly, nevertheless, this "truly philosophical question for the meaning of being in its totality, brought to its culmination in man, becomes the religious question for his total salvation"[603] . With this, every religion simply wants to offer a (full) meaning to human existence, as such. It is true that the different religions present very different answers. But, nevertheless, for Balthasar, they can be grouped into three main types of argumentation as answers. In the first place, we find a *dualistic* response. Here we find not only the classical dualisms. Also the most absolute monism denies everything that is apparent and that, therefore, is diverse from the existence of the One. Hence that which is apparent - that non-being - which is denied, in which consists the reality that we actually live, is then the non-true. Therefore, what we naturally regard as "being" is in reality a "non-being" from which we must detach ourselves. Thus, in the end, we arrive at an identity between being and non-being, which hides a religious philosophy of detachment or loss of self. The second response can be called, in a very broad way, *gnostic*. It is a matter of understanding worldly reality as the appearance of the divine in the world, with which there is a possibility of experiencing the divine in the worldly. For this, the human being must recognize that seed scattered in the world, pick it up, and live from that seed, which in the end is identified with himself. Therefore, it is necessary to renounce a true difference between God and the human being. It is the non-difference - philosophical or religious - that destroys the reality of the human person as a finite reality. The third response consists in an attempt to distinguish, within the sphere of the divine, an unknowable and absolute sphere, different from a phenomenal-accessible form. Thus, for example, one can interact with "the gods" (in the polytheistic manner) and leave in the background the destiny, as something unknowable; or other forms of unknowability of the divine background. But there it is not possible to reach God, properly speaking.

As we have been able to see, these answers do not solve the fundamental question of man's -true- access to God; either because the

monistic systems try to close the abyss that does not close; or because the religious metaphysics devised by man starting from himself are not able to cross the abyss either, either because they remain in the mundane or because they do not reach the divine. All of them remain in the aporia. However, in all these proposals there are many *logoi spermatikoi,* but they are not integrable with each other, because in their most decisive points they seem to exclude each other:

> This means that in the approaches of the religious philosophy (Christianly speaking) developed from man, many *logoi spermatikoi* came to light, where some of them could integrate in themselves others, and that, however, integration was not possible in the decisive part because postulates that apparently exclude each other were confronted to the end; such that, within the human questioning, they could not be united in a metaphysical system that is comprehensible with the sight of our mind . [604]

Therefore, the answer cannot come from reason. It must be sought from the other pole-the freedom of God-though without neglecting or rejecting reason. The pole must be the direct revelation of God, as a word that confronts the quests of reason, thus opening up the possibility of a truly integrating response. This puts us back on the aesthetic path of a beauty that appears (or manifests itself).

This is the third step, which unexpectedly encounters man: *the word of God as revelation,* in which everything begins with a voice that resounds, but which does not claim to be an answer to man's ultimate question, but rather a free word, full of authority, that challenges man. And that word promises a covenant of love and asks for the obedience of children, that is, it is an encounter of God with the human being for his ultimate fulfillment. Thus, Christianity, once dogmatically formulated, presents two fundamental truths, which even for Islam and Judaism are an absurdity: the incarnation and the Trinity. This gives Christianity a unique character in its teaching. The question then is whether Christianity, with these two fundamental teachings, succeeds in integrating the axioms of the other religions, including Islam and Judaism.

With respect to Judaism and Islam, Christianity can perfectly assume the two essential points that support their theologies and from which they reject the Christian postulates: "insurmountable distance between God and creature (the latter is the creation of the free omnipotence of

God) and acceptance of a self-revelation of God distinct from creatureliness, by gratuitous love"[605] . If we now refer to what is common to Eastern religions, which is the desire to dissolve oneself in God with one's own self-denial, this is based on the non-understanding of how it is possible that in the face of the infinite a finite being can still have value and dignity. Now - and this is very important - Christianity overcomes all this with the affirmation that God is love and, therefore, in himself must be fruitfulness and self-giving. Now, the important thing about this is that it is based on and implies that, within the unity of God, there is also the *other*. This means that in God himself, space is given to the other - that is, to otherness. And this *other* who is divine (the Son), justifies the otherness of the creature with respect to God, since this "other" of God (the creature), without eliminating the God-creature difference, can become "other" even in the condition of creature[606] . We see, then, that the fact that there is an *other* in God resolves the insoluble problems up to now: the spiritual subject can have the inalienable condition of person; suffering and death, beginning with the Cross, as a sign of God's love, can acquire a positive meaning; and all the fragility and expiration of the created becomes positive in the other of God incarnate. Now, all this must have an absolutely Christological foundation and presupposition: the Word became flesh and resurrected the flesh, which means the assumption of finitude in the infinitude of God. All in all,

> it cannot be said *a priori* that such a representation of God, who can only be the One, is contradictory. Nor can it be said that it can be constructed or postulated on the basis of the world. Thus, God remains a mystery, of which Christ certainly says that he is not enclosed within himself, but revealed and given to the world in Jesus Christ. This mystery can also be accepted in its revelation as true and, therefore, believed only in free decision, aroused by the grace of God; thus underlining once again that this total process of the integration of all the fragments of the meaning of existence cannot be a strict "demonstration" for the truth of the Christian faith. If there were such a demonstration, the act of faith would be superfluous . [607]

A novel proposal for a fundamental theology

Let us conclude this chapter by highlighting the novel aspects of this fundamental theological proposal and explaining its place within the

entire *Trilogy,* since the latter is its great fundamental-dogmatic theology. First of all, in order to understand well this "fundamental theological aesthetics", we must keep in mind what we have already said in the first chapter about the fundamental structure of the *Trilogy* based on the three transcendentals of being, and their specific ordering: beautiful, good, true. In fact, we have seen that Christian revelation has assumed the basic structure of being, and has thus made itself present in a form that is a manifestation of the depth of absolute Being (as the foundation of all being) which, in manifesting itself (beautiful), at the same time gives itself (goodness) and, giving itself, expresses who it is (truth). In such a way that this fundamental theological proposal, elaborated from the perception of the form as manifestation of the beautiful -which we have just exposed-, is well integrated within that global articulation of the Trilogy, as a fundamental-dogmatic theology, which is developed precisely from the three transcendentals of being.

Based on this structuring from the transcendentals and from faith as perception of form, we can now understand the systematizing axes of his fundamental theology[608] . In the first place, in his theological proposition everything originates from God himself, who is the center of everything and who has freely manifested himself to human beings in an unexpected and always new way. Therefore, the fundamental element of his proposal is of a theological order: God has the absolute primacy and the entire initiative, both in the substance and in the form of revelation. However, this is linked - in a very free way, but at the same time, by the same creative will of God, who left his mark on creation and, particularly, on the human person - to the fact that, in his very manifestation, God responds profoundly - although once again completely free - to the deepest longings and meaning of reality and of the human being. This is verified precisely in the aesthetic structuring of revelation, but also in the fact that every being that manifests itself presents itself radically, at the same time, as a donation - a gift - that is, as the fruit of a primordial love, which indicates that all reality is founded on love. And this responds to what is most proper to the human being in its double aspect: its need to

give love and to be loved.

Indeed, a theological aesthetic makes it possible to perceive with greater force the priority of God in history, since everything always begins with the beauty that manifests itself - with the appearance of God in a concrete form - that is perceived and seized; and, along with being perceived, it is given, but in such a way that the one who perceives it can never become master of what is manifested to him. Every being remains free in its surrender, and it is a surrender that also leaves freedom to respond or not to this openness of being. And just as - due to the interpenetration of the transcendentals among themselves - beauty is united to goodness and truth, so also in the manifestation of God, his own surrender is incorporated and, in the surrender, the word that God pronounces about himself. This is why the unity of the transcendentals is so important, but, at the same time, their proper order, that is, that beauty comes first, which highlights with maximum clarity both the love and the freedom of God. And, on the other hand, the fact that it is structured on the basis of the transcendentals of *being* implies that it is structured on the basis of the most basic, the most universal and the most common of reality (= the existence of things), that is, nothing is left out, and it can therefore be a proposal for all, without exception: it is fully universal, without exclusion.

Now, the possibility of revelation is based on the *analogia entis,* but an analogy that does not forget that in similarity there is always a greater dissimilarity. Indeed, on the one hand, in the created being the transcendentals unfold traversed by an ineliminable polarity-which we have already explained-where unity is in an insurmountable tension between individual and species; beauty, in a polarity between manifestation of being and being that manifests itself; goodness, between the necessity of love, proper to every being, and the indispensable freedom that love must possess to be such; and truth, between being an expression of interiority, but which must pass through a finite, external and conventional language. On the other hand, on the other hand, in God this polarity is completely overcome at a higher level; in such a way that it is brought to its maximum and

absolute unity in the Trinity, but without eliminating the poles or them losing their positivity. And this is possible only because this *analogia entis* (and therefore the analogy of polarity) is ultimately grounded in the Trinity of God, since within it there exists positively the "other" - which is the Son - to whom the Father gives his whole being and places it eternally before himself, as one distinct from himself, but, at the same time, in a mysterious, perfect and unimaginable unity. Therefore, since in the Trinity there is an *other,* there can also be the created "other" - which is the whole of creation as distinct from God - and, in particular, the human being, who, in the Son, can thus enter into a relationship with God[609] . Hence Balthasar's conclusion: if God has created an other, he can also communicate with that other; and if he communicates, he does so in God's way, that is, by surprising, but at the same time, by loving and inviting to communion, because that is precisely what the Son does eternally with . All this will be developed by Balthasar throughout his *Trilogy,* and it was important to mention it here, in order to understand well the content of the *fundamental* theological aesthetics of this great author .[610]

Finally, with regard to content, the manifestation of the Son is given in a *form,* which is a historical and concrete human form, but which, when perceived in faith, manifests its depths, which is the Father: "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn 14:9). Theological aesthetics allows us to express very well the meaning of the revelation of God, insofar as it is a manifestation and authentic gift on the part of God - as such - since God himself is manifested in the form. And the human being, in that form, can encounter him, but without God losing his quality as God, always different, always mysterious, but who, in spite of everything, gives himself to the human being by means of that form. However, this form is neither discovered nor understood on the basis of external comparisons - as useful as that can be in some sense - but only on the basis of itself. It is evident in itself and by its own internal form, and shows its evidence to the gaze with faith from its own happening. Now, it is evident that for the one who perceives it with faith, that faith is united to the grace of the Holy Spirit, and

arises both from the form itself, and from an interior illumination, in a free act of faith. And since it is a historical and situated form, the human being will always find it through various historical mediations and, in particular, in Sacred Scripture and in the Church, which testifies to it and proclaims it.

The latter reveals why fundamental theology must be, at the same time, dogmatic. In a theological aesthetic, fundamental theology and dogmatic theology cannot be separated, since faith in Christ proves its credibility precisely from its own content and not from other external proofs; so that the content is an essential part of fundamental theology itself. And, on the other hand, with respect to other historical proposals, Christianity shows its credibility and veracity in its capacity to integrate the most (= all) elements of those others, which is also part of its content or dogmatic theology.

V. Christianity understood as a "Theo-dramatics".

Along with the elaboration of a theological aesthetics, a second great novelty of Balthasar's was his interpretation of Christianity as a "drama" or, rather, a "Theo-drama", but which is intrinsically linked to the theological aesthetics, as two aspects of the same event. This refers to the use of the instruments of the *theater* (which we can broadly call "drama") to understand the action of God - with the human being - in the world, since "in this total complex that is the theater, there is something that is structured as a development or process (as a representation) and, finally, it is something that is acted"[611] . And that is very much like human existence which is also a representation and a movement, since "the theatrical [can be shown] as an instinct originating in man, which has been said to be even more primitive than our aesthetic needs"[612] . Therefore, theology, as an explanation of God's revelation, which is essentially "action" (i.e., in Greek, "drama") of God, may properly - in the same way - be called a "dramatics." But all this deserves a more extensive explanation. We will do so in three moments: first, we will explain what, for Balthasar, a theodramatic is and its relation to theological aesthetics; then, we will explain why the instruments and concepts of the theater are apt for interpreting revelation; and, finally, we will analyze Balthasar's proposal that describes the Christian being (and, in general, human life) as a "role" or "role" given by God. From these three moments it will be possible to better understand why Balthasar uses the dramatic structure to interpret revelation.

What is a Theo-dramatic

From theological aesthetics to theodramatics

In a theology based on the three transcendentals of being, which essentially cannot exist one without the other, the three moments of this theology (= *Trilogy*) - theological aesthetics, theodramatics and theology - are not only linked to each other, but are also inherent in

each other. Thus, in aesthetics there were already elements of dramatics and, therefore, *Theodramatics* will also be, to a large extent, an explanation of aspects that were already present in *Theological Aesthetics.* Indeed, the historical event that we call "drama" is part of the same "form"; and the manifestation of the "form" -with the rapture it produces- necessarily implies the development of a "drama", as a response to that same manifestation, which fully justifies and obliges the transition from a theological aesthetics to a theodramatics. Balthasar, at the beginning of his *Theodramatics,* makes this explicit:

> According to the initial project, aesthetics constitutes the first part of a triptych. It describes the perception of the phenomenon of divine revelation in its differentiating "glory" that meets us in the world. The first encounter must necessarily be followed by dialogue, confrontation and interpenetration, if one does not want to pass by with a mute gesture. Whoever takes the encounter seriously, as described by Aesthetics, must recognize that he himself has always been involved in the phenomenon that encounters us [...] Already at the heart of Aesthetics the "theological drama" has begun. In the "perceiving" -that is what we called it- there has always been the "being caught up"[613] .

This intrinsic relationship between aesthetics and drama, between manifestation and rapture-response, can be explained - and justified - on the basis of various characteristics of the human being and of revelation.

1. *Aesthetics as the manifestation of an action.* Aesthetics-which is the manifestation of form-is itself a narrative, since, as we have said, the form is not a simple icon, but a concrete existence. "It is the unfolding of the form of the Redeemer, conveyed in the sequential order of the various crucial scenes of his life, which constitute the true center or core of divine revelation"[614] . In aesthetics, the form of Christ was exhibited precisely by narrating his *story,* which passed through the crucial moments of his incarnation, passion, descent into hell and resurrection. And only the narration of this story could authentically show who he was, that is, it revealed that he was truly the infinite love of God who emptied himself out of love for mankind and, in so doing, revealed what is really happening permanently in God as Trinity - infinite and eternal self-giving - and explained the ultimate meaning of the biblical affirmation "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8).

Thus, the volumes of *Gloria* did not simply expose who God was, but

rather the fact that this God "suddenly and by himself, paradoxically and demanding a response, came to us"[615] . This implied two consequences. In the first place, while the aim of aesthetics was to show that light that was perceived, at the same time and inherently, it was to show that one cannot remain indifferent in the face of its splendor, because the one who perceives it is "enraptured" in it and "provoked" to offer some response. All this demanded, then, together with aesthetics, a dramatization of God's action and of human response, as a joint "action". And, secondly, since this theological enterprise of narrating a *Theodramatic* meant contemplating "the dramatic character of existence in the light of biblical revelation"[616] , this meant examining history from God's *actions*, that is, from his particular history with creatures and from what he has done in the world; and, from there, understanding it and elaborating a response. Revelation is a story and, therefore, has to be known and understood as such. All this implied that an aesthetic, in order not to remain incomplete and susceptible to misinterpretation, must necessarily culminate in a dramatic one, since both form but a unity, which will then also imply a theological one.

2. *Human existence as drama and development, reflected in the theater.* This dramatic form of revelation is in tune with human existence, which is also a drama, that is, an action. Indeed, we have said that the "form" of the human being is, in reality, a concrete *existence*, which implies a life -i.e. actions- unfolded in time. But, in addition, the human being possesses an existential pre-understanding of what a drama is (understood as the various existential possibilities that are faced every day), since his life can also be designated as a "drama": he has problems, difficult decisions to make, tensions, catastrophes, also reconciliations, etc. That is why, ancestrally, mankind has practiced theater, "which highlights the dramaticity of existence"[617] from a theatrical representation. This shows, once again, the intimate union between drama and aesthetics, since the theatrical representation aesthetically expresses the drama of existence. In the theater, drama and form are a single reality.

The need of existence to see itself reflected *(speculari)* in something other than itself makes

theater a legitimate instrument, but one that essentially aims beyond itself, of self-knowledge and clarification of being. As a mirror of existence it offers an instrument for its definitive (theological) self-understanding; but as a mirror it must withdraw with all its instruments (in this Kassner is right) to make way for the truth that shines in it only indirectly .[618]

Indeed, the human being needs to reflect himself in a mirror -in its various analogical meanings- to know himself better and thus develop as a person. In this sense, theater is an essential anthropological element, and this is how it has been understood throughout history by different peoples and cultures. However, it is still an instrument and, as such, it is only a parable and an aid for a deeper encounter of the person with himself. And, of course, it will have the same *instrumental* quality when used as an expression of revelation .[619]

Now, if aesthetics was a theory of perception, where there was a certain boundary between the perceiver and the perceived, drama is, in turn, a "theory of the plot", "an aglogic", where this boundary becomes more subtle, since the human being is not (simply) a spectator, but a co-actor in the drama of God. God is not only seen and perceived, but "God acts in man, for man, and then also with man; man's involvement in the divine action belongs to God's action, it is not a presupposition of it; which reveals already that the conceptual instrument of worldly drama can offer a pre-understanding, but by no means an adequate understanding"[620] , since, as we have mentioned, it is always an image or parable.

On the other hand, it is well known that you really know a person only when you see how he or she acts:

Only the action will reveal who each one is, and not in the first place who has always *been* the character that is revealed little by little, but who *will be* the one who is acting, experiencing encounters and making decisions. The one and the other, the "was" and the "will be," are at least in reciprocal relationship. *Agere sequitur esse* [= acting follows being] demands at the same time an *esse sequitur agere* [= being is the consequence of acting] .[621]

This makes it clearer, not only why a theodramatic is necessary, but also that it is very useful for presenting revelation, both because of the way God acts and because of the very reality of the human being. But it is also in greater harmony with that philosophy which is especially attentive to the historical character of reality and the relational character of the human being, as well as to the evolutionary character

of reality and, in particular, of man who, from his freedom - proper to being "spirit" - becomes what he is in a constant process of development and unfolding of himself.

Manifestation of transcendental goodness. Revelation is the perception of God's action-which is an essentially good action-and therefore, it is the expression par excellence of the transcendental *goodness* that emerges from the midst of beauty. Indeed, "what God does in man is not precisely something ambiguous, but what is simply *good.* The good is what theodramatics is all about"[622] . When we speak of Theo-dramatics, that is, of God's action with us, it is not superfluous to insist that his action is always and only goodness -donation and salvation-, that is, love. Balthasar looks again at the order of the transcendentals, to fix now on its center: goodness; which is, therefore, the center of his *Trilogy:*

> The good does not lie primarily neither in looking nor in saying; the former can be *beautiful, the* latter can be *true:* only the act of effective donation, from the personal freedom of the actor to the personal existence of the receiver, can be good. What "aesthetics" first revealed of God's action, his covenant, the establishment of the justice of his covenant, his judgment as a function of that establishment, showed beforehand in the "beauty" of his glory the "good" of his free love, without which neither his glory would have been beautiful nor his word true. Ultimately, therefore, the good that God works can only be explained and confirmed by itself and does not allow itself to be included in the ambiguities of the theater of the world - insofar as existence and stage - .[623]

Indeed, revelation is carried out precisely so that God's gift to man, which is God himself, may be accepted. This is his goodness, and it is this goodness that manifests itself as beautiful and which, as truth, speaks of what God is like. Therefore, it is not surprising that Balthasar has affirmed that the *Theodramatic* is the nucleus of his entire *Trilogy,* because it expresses precisely the kind action of God that saves us, that is, unites us to him and allows us to live forever with him[624] . But, as we have said, in that same drama beauty is manifested and truth is told, in such a way that it always exists as part of a triptych, where it is not possible to separate the three parts. In any case, it is important that the dramatic "parable" always remain as such, that is, as an image, and be differentiated from the *reality* in which God's action in man consists, because God's action, in fact, takes

place in the world and not "outside" of it (i.e. in the theater). God's relationship with the human being is decided - definitively - in the drama of the history of the world and of the present time, not outside of it. This implies that God's dramatic relationship with the human being takes place in concrete reality. In this sense, it is important to recognize that a theological drama is capable of overcoming the two extremes of the history of religions, between "a mythical intertwining of God (or of the gods) in the cosmic drama [...] and a philosophical elevation of God (or of the gods) in the cosmic drama [...].] and a philosophical elevation of God above cosmic destiny , which makes him independent of the drama", precisely by offering the biblical revelation, which shows that "God has committed himself by creating the world, above all by giving rise to finite freedoms, but without thereby falling into a destiny that dominates him"[625] . In this way God has overcome mutability - in the mythical sense - and immutability - in the philosophical sense just described - and can therefore authentically develop a drama in which God and created beings truly participate.

4. *Intersubjective action.* If we speak of drama, we are speaking of action, but if drama refers to the action of God with man, then we are speaking of interrelation and intersubjectivity. Three aspects are involved here. First, the Trinitarian foundation of every possible God-man interrelationship. In order to be able to speak of an action in which God interacts with the human being, there must be, above all, an absolute intersubjectivity within the unity -also absolute- of God himself, which avoids falling into a mythology -of an anthropomorphized God-, as well as being capable of overcoming an unattainable and solitary philosophical immutability. This is given only in the eternal and absolute interrelation of the Father with the Son in the Holy Spirit, as intratrinitarian divine life. Hence, only from the creation and redemption of all things "in Christ" (Col 1:15-18), God has been able to break the barrier between the transcendent and the mundane, by grafting the drama of human existence on the theater of the world, in his own intra-Trinitarian "drama". In fact, the development of the following four volumes of the *Theodramatic* will

consist precisely in this: once the possibility of the existence of a finite freedom has been clarified (vol. II), he shows how the Son can "descend" and become truly man (vol. III), how he can live as man to the extreme of death and descent into hell (vol. IV), and then ascend, resurrected, with his human flesh, to the presence of the Father (vol. V). This means intrinsically and effectively the breaking of the barrier - insurmountable by the creature - between God and man, through an action of God with man - in his humanity - that has also implied the response of the human being himself.

The second aspect, already hinted at earlier, is the inter-subjective character of drama as such[626] . For Balthasar, in his *meta-anthropology,* the human being recognizes his own subjectivity in the same act in which he also recognizes the existence of another. But this double experience, from early childhood, is linked to a third experience - equally original - which is that of being sustained by that other and, therefore, of being welcomed into existence and loved by the other who sustains him[627] . This makes the human being understand himself, from the beginning, with an existence that was given to him: if I exist, even though I could not exist, it is because someone wanted me to exist, and that, finally, is God. Thus it must be affirmed that the ultimate foundation of reality is love and that all human life is relational; and it is understood in its ultimate reality only in relation to its absolute foundation, which is God. The drama must then be understood as a drama of intersubjectivities acting among themselves.

And from there arises the third aspect, which is the mutual responses given by the interactants, always maintaining the abysmal difference between the main actor -God- and the donated actor -man-. On the one hand, there is the dramatic divine "response" to the drama endured by man - his suffering, his death, his sin and his evil - a response that has been pronounced once and for all (*ephapax*) by authentically assuming the human condition, taking it to its extreme in the descent into hell and framing it in an eschatological and definitive horizon that embraces all humanity. And, for his part, the human being, already from the very perception of the form of the pronounced *ephapax*, is enveloped in the ecstasy of the light that

raptures him, which already implies a response to that manifestation. Well then, that response, which is moved by *eros* - and the Spirit that accompanies it - implies not simply contemplating, but also acting, following, becoming a disciple, bearing witness even unto death, in such a way that, together with the perception, there is the *existential* response that involves a historical and free *action* throughout one's life[628] . Just as the form is properly an existence, the response to its perception is also a free and unfolded existence.

5. *Theology must also have a dramatic "form".* For all these reasons, Balthasar, with good reason, has tried to give an appropriate form to the dramatic content of revelation, using the multiple instruments provided by the history of the theater. He has affirmed with conviction: "it is time to dare to make a synthesis, because theology urges it from within, and because from outside - from the drama - it already has so much material at its disposal". And this is not a strange way of doing theology, because "revelation is dramatic in its entirety, in the whole and in the details. It is the story of God's engagement with the world, of a struggle between God and the creature for its meaning and salvation"[629] . Therefore, theology, which is a critical understanding of revelation and human response, will also have to be equally dramatic if it is to be faithful to its object. If the center of revelation is the redemption accomplished by Christ, who has forgiven us our sins and opened up the possibility of an encounter with him - while remaining free to make a response to that divine offer; and if that response, though aided by his grace, is not forced in its freedom and God patiently awaits the final outcome, which, moreover, will also have a judgmental quality; then that dramaticity internal to all its content and development must be reflected in any (= all) systematic theological endeavor. Every theology must leave room for and find an adequate way of expressing the drama of God's salvific relationship with his creature.

Theology throughout history has traditionally had two aspects: (1) It has always been an internal reflection that tries to understand what has been revealed, which necessarily implies an interpellation and a response from the hearer of that word. And that is essentially dramatic

because not every response leads to the same end. And (2) it has always had also an outward orientation, towards an apologetic, or critical, or hermeneutical form, which tries to expose its own message to the world. It is also questioning, because it raises questions that cannot leave the listener indifferent; in other words, it is dramatic.

In such a way that, both in substance and in form, that is, in its content and in its structuring, theology is dramatic. This dramaticity could also be summarized as the relationship between nature and grace. In fact, the dialectic of nature and grace is based precisely on the fact that man is created with freedom and, therefore, with conscience and with an unrenounceable commitment to the world in which he lives and from which he lives. And there God appears, also committed to the world in a human-divine drama and with a radical commitment to the world. Well, all this poses a question to the human being: who am I? Hence the concepts of person and role in life are central, as is the dialectic between immanence and transcendence, between nature and grace, between Creator and creature. This is the theological background that allows us to speak of revelation with dramatic categories. And although it is a difficult task, we must thank Balthasar for having undertaken it with so much effort and fruit.

Sources of inspiration for his Theodramatics

Although Balthasar is novel in his "theodramatic" proposal, nevertheless, as he himself acknowledges, in all his theology he has only tried to make a synthesis with the elements provided by the very rich Christian tradition and Western culture[630] . This can also be said, in particular, with respect to his dramatic instruments. *Roughly speaking, it* can be affirmed that there are five areas or sources that, in different ways and from different places, have influenced his dramatic elaboration .[631]

A first important source is certainly the *Fathers of the Church.* As we have mentioned above, he himself acknowledges how much he owes to his patristic studies, in his student days and in his first years of ministry. This influence is manifested in many themes that he assumes from patristic sources (in Christology, in grace, in ecclesiology), but, in addition, he was structured in his *forma mentis* by patristic

theology, as he himself has said on more than one occasion and we had the opportunity to mention it. In this second sense, his patristic formation allows him to understand revelation "dramatically", starting from the solution that the Fathers give to the paradox proper to the relationship between the created being and the Uncreated One. Here one could speak of Irenaeus and his theology of the accustoming of the flesh to the Spirit, or of the Greek theology of divinization, or of the whole development of patristic theology on the history of salvation. However, at the beginning of *Theodramatica* II, he makes this direct influence a little more explicit:

> As far as God is concerned: he *really* reveals, even if God in this revelation remains the ungraspable. This paradox constitutes the center of the "theology" of the Greek Fathers [...] If it is not possible for God to speak in such a way that in this speaking *he* expresses himself, if the Word of God as Son does not have the capacity to show the Father (to show the truth of the ancient formula *loquere ut videam te* [= speak so that (I) recognize you]), we would go back to a stage prior to Nicaea, to Arianism and semi-Platonism. The Cappadocians were able to maintain against the late Arians both aspects of the paradox: the distinction between "nature" and "energy" (thus rejecting the inapprehensibility of God in concepts) and the capacity of this God to be reflected in his Word, in his Son, in whom the Father has expressed himself from all eternity. Maximus the Confessor will fix this paradox in a definitive way, surpassing Palamas in advance. For the dramatist this means that only in the unfolding of his history with men does the unveiling of the "heart of God" take place, which is what truly shows us *who* he is .[632]

God reveals himself through his drama. This is the importance of the Fathers - Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus the Confessor, but also many others - which allows Balthasar to base on them the necessity of a drama for an authentic understanding of God: God is known in his action. And this, not only because of human reality, which needs time and space to understand, but because the essence of God is precisely love that acts, that reveals itself by saving, that gives itself and makes itself known in its acts.

2. Two authors who, for Balthasar, have been important in his understanding of revelation as a drama, either by their emphases or by their instrumentality, are *G. W. F. Hegel and Karl Barth,* even if he presents differences and even criticisms of them. Balthasar has explicitly acknowledged the influence of both and, moreover, it is readily apparent throughout his own work[633] . In a sense, he is at all

times in dialogue with them. In the case of *Barth*, there is also a personal friendship that lasted for several years. He appreciates both of them very much, although he also differs with both of them in important things. We said that Balthasar recognizes "how much he owes Karl Barth", particularly in his "vision of an integral biblical theology"[634] , which has helped him to deepen the centrality of the *Word* that challenges and determines the whole life of the Christian, and in a profound theology of history. In this sense, B. Quash is right in affirming:

> For Balthasar, the great appeal of Karl Barth can be attributed in large part to the dramatic character of his theology. According to Barth, God acts in radical freedom, and is known in his acts. To the extent that Barth's theology has attempted to let the Bible speak on its own terms, it is signaling his concern to show that God will be better known in a narrated interaction than in the abstraction of such narratives. His theology is a theology of the divine-human encounter .[635]

Barth's biblical and dramatic Christology emphasizes "the importance of time and action in the correct understanding of the relationship between God and the creature"[636] . Barth's theology has all the elements of a dramatic one: God acts with absolute freedom; he is known by his action in the world; faith is an intimate encounter with the Savior; and God is the true protagonist of human history, whose desire, since creation, has been to establish an eternal covenant with the human being. The absolute Christological centrality - that is, of Christ's justifying action - is profoundly dramatic and explains very well the importance that Barth had for Balthasar in elaborating his dramatic conception.

During his studies of German philology, Balthasar affirmed that "above all Goethe and Hegel" were important[637] . Indeed, throughout his *Trilogy* he is in constant dialogue with *Hegel* -his presence recurs throughout his work-, and we will have the opportunity -in the next chapter- to review his critical relationship with him, especially *In the Space of Metaphysics*. In *Theodramatics* I, in two moments he stops to review Hegel's dramatic proposal: at the beginning, where he exposes the values and criticisms found in Hegel's dramatic conception[638] ; and at the end, when he speaks of the "role" or "role" of the person during his life -which for Balthasar will be the "mission"-, but which in Hegel

is presented as alienation[639] . Indeed, "for Hegel drama clearly constitutes the summit of all art," which "realizes the perfect and superior synthesis" of epic and lyric[640] . For Hegel, as for Balthasar, it is God himself who acts in history, so that both consider history as a drama, despite the very different conceptions of God and history that both may have and, above all, the different appreciation of *freedom* that there may be in that drama. Indeed, the basic point is similar: there is a development of history that involves the involvement of God and human beings. Moreover, for Hegel, as for Balthasar, the three elements of drama or representation appear in the story: characters who act, a stage on which they act, and an action that they develop. These three elements are fundamental at the moment of representing a drama and, for both, they are also elements in the drama of the history of God with the human being .[641]

So, although Hegel's basic vision differs substantially from that of Balthasar, since for the former - according to Balthasar - in Christianity "the absolute spirit sees only what it is itself: the god who alienates himself and returns to his identity"[642] ; and that this implies that God has alienated himself and returns to his own identity, in such a way that Christology is transformed into philosophy and thus eliminates the Trinity as such, thereby annulling "the difference between tragedy as representation and passion as seriousness, and the analogy (required to form a theodramatic) is absorbed into identity"[643] ; nevertheless, it presents an instrumentality and a structure that is extremely apt for the project that Balthasar develops. And, moreover, the attention he pays to it and its recurrent criticism, is indicating precisely the influence received and the elements in common that both have, since in a "discussion" both sides always affect each other, otherwise, they would not find the common ground from which to *dialogue*.

3. Obviously, the most evident and copious source is *the abundant dramatic literature,* which he cites and studies throughout his work, particularly in *Theodramatica* I. From it he takes all the instruments and language for his dramatic elaboration. There he makes a historical tour, showing how Western literature has configured "the *topos*

'theater of the world'". Indeed, "in the West a tradition is propagated that transmits from one conception of the world to another, an image of the theater, changing it, completing it, enriching it, from time to time narrowing it and cutting it, and that, nevertheless, is as current today as in its origins"[644] . It is possible to read these erudite pages of *Theodramatica* I, since here we will only underline the main currents and some authors particularly relevant to him, taking into account that behind this volume is Balthasar's vast literary culture and his particular taste for theater, verified in his rich personal library -whose dramatic and literary section was in his room, next to his bed- and in his assiduous attendance to the theater .[645]

Balthasar notes that the history of the theater, which arises with humanity itself, has had a development with various emphases, but also with decadences and, finally, with the loss of the "*topos* 'theater of the world'". In the *ancient world,* theater was based on the idea that men live under the gaze of the gods, who sometimes do not see things in the same way as human beings. Under that gaze, each human being had to develop with freedom and honesty the role that corresponded to him; but the reasons for the differences perceived - and suffered - in the roles assigned to each one, and the *justice of* them, never appear very clear. With the arrival of the Christian world, the situation became ambiguous, because the theater was rejected -although it was still frequented-, although theatricality was used. In fact, the *topos* theater of the world, in Christian antiquity, was abandoned, due to the ethical criticism that the themes treated there deserved, as well as for the type of life that the artists led; although many elements for a positive and theological evaluation of the theater could be found in the Bible. In fact, already in classical antiquity the theater was criticized because of its brutality and sensoriality, so that Christian writers only continued in the same direction. Moreover, with the Christian opposition to the myths - as opposed to the *truth* of the incarnation of the Logos - the theatrical representation of them also fell. And then - in this same path - the Christian emperors declared the actors to be dishonest people, partly because their itinerant life forced them to a certain marginalization from the rules of social coexistence.

If to this we add that the theater was a propitious and important occasion for social criticism -both civil and religious-, then there was also a political/religious opposition to it. All this produced a certain social contempt towards those who made theater, in spite of the generalized taste for participating in such spectacles. This ambiguity was maintained as long as both Christian monarchies and the political power of the Church remained in force.

Notwithstanding the above, in the *Medieval West,* liturgy also helped to unfold new theatrical possibilities. Sacred and cultic drama - with its center in the Eucharist - and the development of the liturgical season - with its apogee in Holy Week - were what opened the doors to sacred representations. Beginning with readings and chanting in various choirs, this led to complete theatrical representations of the mysteries of salvation -including the lives of the saints-. The interesting thing about that culminating moment of development is that it broke with the closed space of the temple and the clergy, as it now took place in the street and by the laity. In this sense, together with the rejection of "secular" theater, this new situation arose, which increasingly motivated the sacred representations, which from there passed to the "theater of the world", where the "profane" situations of human existence were once again represented. Life was understood as a spectacle in which we all found ourselves as actors and God was the poet who distributed the roles. Here the fundamental author - who gave theological depth to this same *topos* and whose influence on Balthasar is great - is Pedro Calderón de la Barca, with his play *El gran teatro del mundo (The Great Theater of the World).* During the Baroque period, when this theme was widely deployed, the absolute was represented *in* the transitory of this world and, therefore, the play of the whole dialectic between the subject and the role assigned to him in life could be observed there.

With the advent of *modernity*, things became more varied and complex. As the idea of God changed, so did the topos-theater of the world. Thus we find new and very diverse ways of evaluating the drama of life. Let us indicate some of them. In the Enlightenment, with a "watchmaker" God, who lets the world function automatically

and does not get involved in it, man is transformed either into a machine or a puppet, or into a character immersed in a permanent improvisation and without relation to God. For transcendental philosophy, on the other hand, the phenomenal world of the theater is simply a play of spectres without foundation in the *noumenos*. On the other hand, against the unitary vision of the baroque, we find a new dimension: that of an absolute anthropological freedom, where each poet (= human being) creates with absolute freedom and where the absolute that "unifies" everything is only the sum of temporal freedoms, because there is neither director nor libretto. And all the transcendental reflection of idealism, at bottom, hid the elimination of the difference between God and self, that is, the progressive divinization of the self and the substitution of God by the self, or the submission of the empirical self to an absolute without self.

After idealism, Balthasar presents "three prototypical authors: Grillparzer, Hebbel and Ibsen" who, although they try to subtract themselves from Hegel, still fail to reconcile the idea of finitude of personal destiny with the infinitude of a divine destiny, because they no longer have access to the Christian concept of "sending" or "mission"; and so, "in the place of this role enters nostalgia, the presage of totality, the aspiration, the Platonic prior intuition of God, which aspires to the infinite through the limitation of finitude"[646] . After them, already reaching the twentieth century, Hofmannsthal presents a theater that is still theocentric. And Friedrich Nietzsche, George Bernard Shaw and Luigi Pirandello, although they also offer a theater of the world, nevertheless, it is a theater incapable of representing a significant work because it has lost its metaphysical and theological density by no longer representing God, nor understanding the role as a mission.

From all this historical journey, Balthasar wants to show not only the development of theater -which has had moments of growth and moments of decline-, but he also wants to highlight the intense presence of theatrical representation in human life. With this, throughout the volume, he confirms that the theater is a "parable" suitable to represent and understand the existential relationship

between God and the human being, a relationship that is always dynamic, free and open to the future. This is the philological and cultural background of Balthasar, with which he attempts his own Theo-dramatic work. However, from what has been said, it is impossible not to be surprised by the fact that, once this vol. I is finished, references to this abundant dramatic literature are so scarce, if not completely absent. And it is completely valid, then, to ask oneself the question about the real integration of that literature in his Theo-dramatic work. The answer implies a nuance. The use of all the dramatic instrumentation - extensively exposed in *Theodramatica* I - is indirect, therefore, do not expect that in the following volumes - necessarily - he will explicitly cite those same literary works. He already did so abundantly in vol. I. But even so, that literature does not remain extraneous to what follows, but is only used in a diverse and indirect way. In *Theodramatica* I, called precisely for that reason *Prolegomena,* he attempts a global reflection on theatrical literature, which can justify the assumption of drama as a way of understanding revelation. Once this is justified, all this literature and the abundant examples cited will be present in the following volumes in a more invisible way and only as a general horizon of understanding.

4. In a more indirect but equally profound way, Balthasar also draws on his *Ignatian* tradition. B. Quash is right when he considers that the vols. Quash is right when he considers that vols. II-V of *Theodramatica* show a special influence of Ignatian spirituality and, in particular, of the *Spiritual Exercises*[647] . We have already mentioned that for Balthasar, in the *Exercises,* "the Christian who is maturing, who must choose his life, is led by Ignatius to a personal encounter with Christ: in a contemplation of a concrete evangelical situation [...] Christ chooses us and calls us; that we choose him is only obedience as a response"[648] . Indeed, the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius are a contemplation that leads to an action, which is clearly in tune with an aesthetic that leads to a dramatic one. And what is to be contemplated in the "exercises" is the *action* of God in one's own life and in the Gospel. Or, on the contrary, it is necessary to contemplate his action in the Gospel, in order to discover his action in one's own life. In any

case, the *Exercises* are the discernment of the action of the Spirit in the retreatant. One can easily perceive how all this is expressed theologically in the *Theodramatic,* starting from the presentation of human life as vocation-mission and "dramatic" relationship between the infinite freedom of God and the finite freedom of the human being.

5. Finally, a last - and very significant - source for Balthasar is certainly *Adrienne von Speyr.* As we have already shown in the chapter devoted to their mutual theological relationship, Adrienne in many respects was indeed very relevant for Balthasar. And here we have to add that she was also relevant for his dramatic understanding of revelation and theology. It was an influence, in a certain sense, rather indirect, but theologically very important. As for the specific influence on the *Theodramatics,* if in the case of the Fathers of the Church we saw that the influence had been given, above all, from the content of their works; in the case of Adrienne von Speyr, the influence has been fulfilled, first of all, in the *way* of doing theology, although not exclusively in it (since, as we said, there are also important theological themes in which its foundation is Adrienne's theology). Indeed, as we have also mentioned, all of Adrienne's vital and mystical experience was oriented to the theological content that she delivered in her dictations and they are understood only with that objective: as a charism for the service of the contemporary Church. "Adrienne von Speyr's mysticism, however, is peculiar in not making the supernatural-psychological particularly thematic, but in understanding them functionally in view of the objective to be transmitted"[649] . "It is a matter of the possibility of objectifying what has been lived by transmitting it immediately to a representative of the Church (and, therefore, of the requirement of absolute transparency or of a perfect 'confession'), a *sine qua non* condition for what was carried out here"[650] . It was a matter of theological content, which had to be reflected on in the Church today, but based on personal *experiences* and *experiences*. His charism and his multiple and varied experiences were a mission, a prophecy for the Church. And "it is not possible to understand the charism of prophecy as a purely 'intellectual' charism, rather than [...]

an 'existential' charism, which completely takes over the whole faith, the whole life, the whole personality, the whole devotion of the elect"[651] . Well, here we see with maximum clarity the precisely "dramatic" character of his prophecy: all its content was framed in "experiences," "encounters," "conversations," "offerings and passions proper" to his life. And Balthasar, in the brief but profound introductions to his dictations, underlines precisely this dramatic sense of Adrienne von Speyr's prophecy. He states, for example, with regard to her Passion experiences, that "her reflections form a whole insofar as they are always concerned with the inner aspect of the Passion event, primarily with the inner states and experiences of Christ, but sometimes also with those of the disciples or other persons involved in the event"[652] .

This can be made even clearer with a concrete example. One of the most characteristic things of Adrienne von Speyr are her experiences of hell, which she suffered especially during Holy Week -Good Friday and Holy Saturday-; an experience that made her "understand" the intimate feelings that Jesus experienced in those moments and also those of other people, to then transmit them to Balthasar, but with the purpose of illuminating the *theology* of hell, which at that time was tremendously mythologized and little deepened:

> Adrienne's mission, however, was not only to suffer subjectively from physical pain and abysmal states of emotional suffering, but also to give an accurate theological interpretation of them. Therefore, she has probably advanced more than any other mystic in the Church so far. It is about the portrayal of the mystery, how obedience enabled the Son of God to bear all the sin of the world, what this means for him experientially, what vast landscapes of suffering - always new glimpses, perspectives, unexpected changes, deepenings - appear here, how in him the sense of time is suspended, what fear, abandonment of God, separation from human beings, separation from the mother, etc., means for the Son. This portrait is always in the dialectic between distance and proximity, complete separation and yet reunification of the suffering sinner, as Adrienne feels, with the suffering Lord: participation is also experientially indirect. To describe this correctly is one of the most difficult and important things in her mission of passion .[653]

This example is extremely explicit. Here we see with crystal clarity that the content is given *from* an action (= passion!) and without that action-passion that content simply would not have existed. One can say with all certainty that Adrienne's dictations are tremendously

dramatic in a double sense: because they are born of her own suffering and relationship with God and, at the same time, because they express, for the reader, that same dramaticity of their own content. It is a narration - with all its dramaticity - of something lived in the flesh. So, if for 27 years Balthasar shared those experiences with Adrienne, and for 10 years he listened to and wrote the dictations of his more than 60 vols, it is evident that he knew very deeply what a "narrated drama" can mean for the good of the readers. Moreover, no doubt that experience has greatly influenced the conviction with which Balthasar presents the dramaticity of Christianity and theology.

Topicality of the subject

Balthasar's intention in the entire volume of *Prolegomena,* with which he introduces his theodramatics, is evidently not to boast of an exhaustive knowledge of the theories of drama throughout history, but simply to show that drama is "a fundamental category of the history of Christian revelation"[654] -which he did precisely with the historical journey presented above- and that, therefore, drama is also present in current theology. But, as A. Haas rightly states, "for Balthasar it is by no means a question of appropriating theologically a model of the world and of man, which is frequent today. It is rather a question of asking whether the moment of the dramatic could not confer, in the totality of the happening of the world and of salvation, the horizon of meaning and interpretation for all the contexts of events and facts that have happened or could ever happen"[655] . That is why he devotes a few pages to identifying from contemporary theology some elements that effectively show this dramatic quality present in theology today. He discovers nine elements that, at present, have been accentuated and developed in theology, and that possess an undeniable dramatic quality[656] . We now present, in a succinct manner, these dramatic characteristics found in modern theology:

1. Theology studies an *event* that happens and not a static essence. Its object "is entirely an event that breaks vertically into the chain of intramundane facts and as such reveals at the same time the way of being of the living God, his way of acting"[657] .

2. The *historical* receives a new vertical valuation in the fact that God himself is inserted into history and, becoming man, becomes a co-actor in the drama of humanity in the world. With this, every moment of horizontal history can experience and express the absolute event of salvation because every categorical and changeable situation refers back to its transcendental nucleus.

3. Christianity is not a doctrine, but a *praxis.* In fact, God shows who he is through his action in the world; and the Christian demonstrates his faith through an effective and concrete love of neighbor, as an expression of the following of Christ. Christianity is a self-donation of self.

4. The *principle of dialogue* is "one of the most fruitful new approaches in Christian thought and life" today. All "biblical history has its center in the covenant between God and man; in it man, created by God and endowed with freedom, has been granted a space of selfhood, of free listening and response, and ultimately of responsible cooperation with God"[658] . This is what makes possible a true and permanent dialogue of God with humanity, but there always remains the possibility, on the part of the human being, of closing oneself to this dialogue.

5. In religions, the religious has always been linked to the *political.* And Christianity has not unlinked them either, since solidarity is obligatory and this is also political. However, what is specifically Christian is under the paradox of being neither here nor beyond the political situation, but in that place where the fact that the kingdom of God is not of this world, with the fact that it comes to this world and that it acts in this world, comes together.

6. Theologies of the *future* and *eschatological* theologies are especially desirous of the real transformation of the world. The eschatological is the experience of touching that intimate boundary between time and eternity, despite being within the expiration of mortal life. And the future is to open a space for a forward escape. A dramatic one will even help them not to fall into utopia.

7. The dialogical, now understood in a social and communitarian sense, is called *functional.* This is an instrument that has been very

useful for understanding the Church, since it studies "the rules of the game pre-established by society"[659] , suitable for reciprocal exchanges. These are the structures that constitute a pre-subjective language at all social levels and that can explain social relations and the subjects themselves.

8. Linked to the previous theme are all the studies on the *role* or *role* of the person, who must follow a certain function assigned to him/her in the midst of society. This raises the tension between personal identity and role: although they are not the same thing, the role helps the person to be him/herself.

9. Finally, there are all those theologies and currents of thought on the *theme of evil* that today hold God responsible for the failures of creation and, by the same token, absolutize human freedom. However, these reflections have helped us to enter more deeply into the immense and unfathomable problem of dealing with this "dark" part of creation and the dramatic confrontation between divine and human freedom.

We can affirm, then, that all these contemporary theological approaches have arisen due to dissatisfaction with a theology that did not respond to the dynamicity of life itself, to its historicity, to its contextuality, in short, to its dramaticity. Hence, looked at as a whole and from the positive aspects that each one has, it can be seen that they converge towards a justification of what Balthasar has called a theodramatics.

Dramatic Instrumental

Balthasar devotes a large part of vol. I of *Theodramatica* to describing the instruments that the theater uses to represent its plays, and makes an effort to show the parallel that exists - albeit always with a greater dissimilarity - between the structure that determines the theater and that which orders the story of God with man, insofar as it is dramatic. They can be synthesized in three major structural aspects. As we have already mentioned, Balthasar will not use this instrument in a direct and explicit way, but it will serve him only as a hermeneutical criterion to highlight the dramatic character of revelation and of the

theology that studies it.

Topos "theater of the world

In Balthasar's historical journey -which we have already synthesized above- he has implicitly provided all the elements for understanding revelation as a drama. However, at the end of this long journey, he elaborates the result of *The Theater of the World as an Instrument*[660] . There he states:

> The *topos* "theater of the world" was chosen as a means to elaborate a dramatic instrument that could be used by theology, because in its concentration it contains, in the greatest richness (broad and precise at the same time), the elements that, created from the dramatic process itself, give occasion for a religious interpretation, basically theological, of existence .[661]

Indeed, the desire of the human being to represent before himself aspects of his own existence shows that existence itself possesses a dramatic element and a reflection on itself, which the theater makes explicit. The theater, more than an image, is a symbol of the world; even the ambivalence of the theater, between the comic and the tragic, also shows the ambivalence of existence. In this sense, the theater reveals itself as an ideal element to reflect the deepest and most profound aspects of human existence itself and, in the first place, its relationship with God. After all his journey, Balthasar discovers in the theater four *leitmotifs,* which are also characteristic of existence and thus show the relevance of the use of dramatic instruments.

1. *Difference between the (spatio-temporal) finiteness of representation and its infinite significance.* The theatrical work, with the finiteness of its spatio-temporal action, is presented as a mirror in front of the equally inexorable finiteness of human existence. There, the possibility for a spectator to judge the drama supposes a transcendent gaze, which must wait until the end of the performance to judge the immanent action. This fact is now a warning to the spectator about himself, in the sense that he too is under a final transcendent judgment. All this substantiates and shows the profound and ineliminable ambiguity that exists between appearance and seriousness of the scenic representation; which is indicating, in turn, the seriousness and profound meaning that even the most insignificant

thing of daily life can have. Indeed, the finite can come to have a truly eternal meaning. And there, in that finite, freedom becomes present and the determinant that a given event can be for that same freedom. But, with that, it also never loses the possibility of re-signifying that same event, in a permanent game of searching for authentic freedom in this tension between finiteness and eternal meaning.

2. *Difference between the self and the entrusted role.* "This difference, as a fundamental experience of existence, is historically at the origin and conclusion" of the idea of world theater[662] . It is an intermediate situation between dualism and identity. In the theater there is a true identification, but in the distance that always remains, between person and role. It is a matter of fulfilling the role well, although the person is not that role and, therefore, it is not so much the role that matters as its execution. Thus, the role determines the destiny of the actor and, therefore, it also determines his own being to some extent; although the actor never dissolves in his role, and he himself, with his own characteristics, is precisely the guarantee for executing that role well. On the other hand, all this is united and in a profound relationship with the social element of the role itself, because in the play, the actors depend on each other. Each character forms a whole with the rest, and together they give meaning to the whole play. Yet there is something incommunicable in each actor, which implies an element of loneliness in each performance, and which cannot be eliminated from the characters. All this brings to light some essential human characteristics regarding self-identity, freedom, social relationships and the unrepeatability of each person.

3. *Difference between the actor's own responsibility to his interpretation and his responsibility to the director.* The two differences just indicated allude to a higher identity, to a source of origin that is responsible for the role recited within the scene, for the various roles and their contexts: the director of the play. Each actor recites his performance with freedom and responsibility, but within the only global responsibility of the play and in the midst of many other particular freedoms of each actor. The freedom is not absolute , although it is realized in the specifics of each role which, in turn, is articulated with

the whole. Now, if the responsibility of each actor is in relation to the director, then the director, if he is responsible for the whole work, is not a simple passive spectator. His responsibility for the whole involves him in the execution of the whole. All this shows us once again the profound relationship between immanence and transcendence in the theater and in human existence.

4. *The three differences as a space freed for the tension of the dramatic action.* The content of the play is determined by the three differences just mentioned, which comprise the meaning of the play, the role assigned and the good execution of that role. This implies that "in the first place, the content can only be man himself, in his problematicity between self and role, between what he is and what he interprets"[663] . But his relationship with the other actors and with the director must also be included. In addition, the meaning of each of the actors and events and their relation to the total meaning must be considered. All this gives the theater an innumerable number of meanings, relationships, possibilities and tragedies, all of which must be considered. And all this must be, moreover, coordinated from a higher point of view. One can perceive then the enormous difficulty of the theater, but at the same time, its immense richness and its privileged place to interpret the human being and the revelation of God to the creature.

Existential elements of drama

In the "topos theater of the world" one started from the theater to illuminate existence, now it is a matter of starting from existence and drawing from it elements to understand the theater[664] . Here we find ourselves, once again, with a characteristic very characteristic of Balthasar's way of thinking: reality is polar and the two poles of this duality are always mutually illuminating each other. We said at the beginning of this work that, for Balthasar, revelation illuminates creation and, at the same time, that creation itself, illuminated by revelation, makes that same revelation shine with new light. With respect to drama, we must affirm a similar play of polarities: the reality of the theater illuminates important aspects of human existence, because human existence is reflected in the theater.

Therefore, theater and existence illuminate and understand each other. In the following, we will then see some existential elements of the human being, which are projected in the theater and which, when we see them reflected in the theater, shed a new light on human existence itself. In comparison with what we have just said about the theatrical *topos* of the world that illuminates existence, it is now a question of the gaze from the other pole: from existence towards the theater. Balthasar reviews *three great existential characteristics* of the human being that are reflected in the theater, in the sense just mentioned.

1. *Theater expresses the hope of revealing something about human existence*[665] . We recognize three longings expressed in theater. We know that in the theater is expressed that ancient longing to represent "the meeting point between a human question and the divine answer within an event made present by men"[666] . For this, the theater must be found in such a relationship with the structure of human existence, that a dramatic action can make present existence itself, where question and answer are unified. It could be understood as a synthesis between the tension intrinsic to personal existence and the tension of knowing what will happen in the representation. And the place where this synthesis is fulfilled is the actor, since in him the relationship between vital reality and aesthetic reality is instituted. Thus, the actor represents both the sphere of existence and the sphere of reality represented in front of the audience.

Theater also represents the pleasure of self-projection and, at the same time, of acquiring a solution to life's own problems. And both pleasures merge into one, which gives the theater all its existential force. But this can only happen because in the theater life experiences are effectively expressed. Thus, the spectator, from the represented play, is invited to *con-form* his own life according to the paradigmatic act represented. But also in daily existence one experiences this double reality of identity and role, in the sense that each person lives in a society that expects something from him, which does not always coincide with what the person himself expects of himself and with what he feels he really is. In society I am who I have to be, according

to society. Indeed, this limits me a little, but, at the same time, it allows me to express myself in a way that everyone can understand and accept me.

And the theater -in the end- expresses and amplifies the spectator's horizon of meaning. In fact, the audience that attends the play, not only perceives the unity of the dramatic action, but also receives a plus of meaning, which is the one that somehow the author has given to the play. Then, the spectator who tries to take in that meaning and project himself into the circle of meaning of the play, can intuit that beyond his own understanding there is still a wider horizon of meaning. This is what gives theater all its depth: being able to broaden the spectator's horizon. In this way the spectator is sent back to the real drama of his own existence, so that he too can open his own horizon of meaning. And this is what ultimately makes the theater "similar" to the Christian revelation, and that is why it can offer a schematic structure to represent the revelation. All this shows, finally, the great possibility of theater, but also its limitation: it forwards, but does not supplant or replace the meaning that each one must seek.

2. *Theater expresses the finiteness of human existence*[667] . We can also recognize three finite aspects of existence that are represented in the theater: the time of the action, the situation or constellation in which the play moves, and the presence of death. In the first place, time. The characters in the drama are mortal and are circumscribed in a limited time and space, but within that horizon they must fulfill a significant dialogical event. Thus, a theatrical representation is an abbreviation or a condensation of human existence as such, since "in its horizontal-temporal narrowness and in the obligation to consummate there coherently an action until its denouement, the drama makes visible (in metaphor) the sense of human finitude in general, and in it also a vertical moment of infinity"[668] . Thus, in the drama is projected the terrible dramaticity of the fact that within a finite time the ultimate and definitive meaning of existence is played out.

With respect to the constellation within which the play moves, "dramatic action is possible and coherent only within a given situation

and contexts which, as starting points, are transformed by the action, but in such a way that the transformations remain variations on the same theme"[669] . Indeed, every play takes place within a context, which is originated by the sum of the characters acting in it, but at the same time, this context is framed within the universal human reality, which questions the meaning of each individual being and of reality as a whole. This means that the drama manifests the truth that each thing is placed in a precise place within the global universe and, seen from a Christian point of view, that each person has a vocation or mission from God in the world. This is what gives rise to the tension between personal freedom to carry out one's own projects and the global context and development of reality, which influences and interacts with the person, and in which he or she must shape his or her projects. Therefore, each concrete choice of existence is determined by the context, which necessarily influences this determination. All this postulates, once again, a superior instance that judges, validates or reproves each of the particular actions. That situational horizon may be called "chance" or "fate" or "God" or "Providence". In any case, in any dramatic representation, whether or not a presence of God is recognized, a global constellation that surrounds it will always be present, because without a horizon of that category, the drama disappears as such; since in it are the vertical realities that determine the horizontal ones and are incarnated in them, although without being completely resolved in them. That is what gives drama its true dramaticity and shows it as an accurate reflection of human existence.

With respect to death: "If the drama is so strictly installed in the limits of space and time, it is ultimately because behind the finitude of the action is the finitude of life and the decisions that occur in it. Death is latent behind all drama, and often (not only in tragedy) becomes its theme"[670] . We know that death has a double ambiguity. On the one hand, it is the inexorable end of life, which is inevitable and which everyone knows will come, but, at the same time, precisely as a final act, it is immanent to all life, it is present in every act and can influence and change the objective and direction of any of the acts

present. On the other hand, death has something humiliating, which ends life, but at the same time, something grandiose that gives meaning to everything that is done in this life. Theater has expressed this amphibological mystery of death in multiple ways, all of them complementary and inseparable from each other. Balthasar recalls nine ways in which death has traditionally been represented in the theater.

Death can appear as a *fatality,* whether it stalks one at all times or appears suddenly and ends everything. It can also appear as an *interpretative light* on life, which places it on a scale and gives it its specific weight, revealing to the person that he or she is a nothingness that has been allowed to live and, therefore, inviting him or her to live more authentically. Death also appears as something *immanent* to life, which is "carried" throughout one's existence and which is absolutely non-transferable to others and from others to oneself. It is also a *frontier,* since it belongs to life but is equally the transit towards another type of existence. The dead are present in some way, but on the other side of a "space" that is impassable for us. Death, in its double meaning -active and passive-, can also be understood as an *expiation* -voluntary or imposed- for a guilty or failed existence, one's own or that of others. Although the interpretation given to that expiation can vary diametrically. There is also the indissoluble union between *love* and *death.* Love can reach such a strength and definitiveness that it rivals death. The underlying theme is the strength of love, so indestructible that not even death can eliminate it. *Vicarious* death, understood as the most noble project of surrendering it actively, making it a substitute for others. It is the sacrifice for others. Finally, there is the theme of the *deposition and death of kings,* which is a death understood as a fall from height to dust. It is a death stronger than normal because it is a descent and humiliation, but at the same time, that same fall can enhance the dignity of the king, because it would shine his majesty, which is inextinguishable. All these motives -combined- appear in the drama and illuminate the event of death, which is a supreme aspect of the fragility of human existence, but at the same time, it is an opening to the transcendence

of itself.

3. *Theater expresses the struggle for the good in human existence.* Finally, we recognize that in the theater the human yearning for good is expressed. Drama -in theater and in life- is essentially a human action, insofar as it is an "action as a project of the meaning of existence that tries to be realized"[671] . It is the projection into the future of one's own existence, which presupposes the spiritual freedom of the human being. In other words, the drama seeks a change in man and/or in the world and, for this, it has different reasons and motivations that creative freedom values and coordinates. Now, from that same creative action arises the tension proper to drama, due to the ambivalence of every present situation, since, always seeking the good, this, on the one hand, has a vanishing point that in itself is unattainable as an absolute good, although it indicates a direction; and, at the same time, it has a concrete point, realizable during life, which is understood as doing the greatest possible good in each concrete situation. In fact, every good to which one tends is surrounded by other values, other goods, other possibilities, in such a way that the human being is in the midst of multiple relative values and from among them seeks to make his way towards the absolute. But in this choice there is also the possibility of choosing wrong. All this determines the drama of human life. This is what is proper to every human act, which the theater helps to project for a better decision: obedience or disobedience to that light that appears on the horizon, which will also judge the rectitude of the conscience of each one. Thus Balthasar reminds us: "Perhaps it is that drama can and must evoke both aspects at the same time: that human action is under a light that is the ultimate instance and that this evaluation is not the concern of any man"[672] .

In this struggle for the good, there are still two other themes that are related, that are also expressed in the theater and that have to do with the meaning of life, which is inherent in the theme of the good. First, in *tragedy* the ultimate meaning of death brings to light the question of the meaning of life. There one can be open to trust in a higher salvation and thus in an ultimate sense of reality; or one can deny all

other possibility beyond meaningless tragedy. But the latter destroys tragedy itself, since values are self-eliminated by understanding everything as an absurdity. The second question has to do with human action, which is always determined by an end, which has been deemed worthy of being achieved since it seems just. Here also appears the issue of the global sense, which makes something just. Therefore, human action does not stop until it finds a final and definitive meaning to its life. All these things are represented in drama. That is why there are tragedies and comedies. Both have universal value, since they typify universal forms of life; and many times tragedy and comedy are united in a single tragicomic work. Both human existence in general, and Christian life in particular, are full of incomprehensible tragic situations, where drama consists in opening up to a broader meaning. But those tragic moments are often also linked to comic moments, which interrelate and give life that mysterious ambiguity it possesses.

Trinitarian structures of dramatics

One of Balthasar's most interesting themes, with respect to drama, is his *Trinitarian* understanding of two ternary structures of drama. This allows him to directly apply these structures of drama to the understanding of revelation. These are the three elements of production[673] and the three elements of realization[674] , where the first triad is at the service of the second, which is the most important and full of meaning.

1. *The three elements of the production: author, actor, director.* First of all, the *author,* who is the one who gives unity to the whole drama that unfolds. "This primacy of unity in the author is understood ontologically"[675] , since he is the one who gives meaning and, therefore, his identity to the whole performance. It is from him that the work emerges and to him it returns at every moment. In this elaboration, the author creates the characters in a dramatic unity and according to a global image of the world. Hence, the author, in a way, is also within the characters, but at the same time, above them. However, a self-limitation is also demanded of him, to let the actors give the characters their own existence. The latter is what validates

the use of the dramatic archetype to understand revelation, since the same is true of God. He too creates human beings within a higher unity, which only he knows, but then he has to limit himself so that human beings can develop their life and their role, based on their own finite freedom. God alone must guarantee this space of freedom for the human being. In drama, characters are given an existence and given a role, but then allowed to be themselves. So too God always remains hidden behind the created work, and although he can act in and on people, he can do so only through them, respecting their space of autonomy. Moreover, in the drama, the written work is already complete and cannot be changed. Thus it has been "written" and thus it is well. The author - the human and the divine - has left his "spirit" in the play and now asks the actors to express, within their limited role, the global horizon of meaning of the whole play, in such a way that the author always lets the actors develop their delimited role with their own autonomy.

The *actor* is the one who *actualizes* the drama, which was still only in potential. He makes the play present, he materializes it. The actor, each time he performs it, makes the drama a unique and unrepeatable reality. In this sense the representation of the play is more important than the text itself, which is only the foundation; but, on the other hand, the actor can only bring into existence what has already been created by the author, who in this other sense is greater than the actor. Thus, both are ordered one to the other in an indissoluble unity of work and representation. The two gazes complement each other without ever becoming identical. On the other hand, the actor is a mediator since he does not recite the role for himself, but for the spectators, so that he also depends on them. The spectators receive and welcome what is represented, but the actor also needs the audience to whom he must make his representation count. That is why the theater is a great communion of all. In another aspect, the recitation of the role requires a good technical mastery, but it also requires a certain "feeling" of the role. The actor, although he assumes his role in a personal way, cannot abandon what the role demands of him. This is very important because, on the one hand, it entirely

involves the actor, who has to empathize with the character represented and act within it, but at the same time, he must avoid creating a new and different character. And, furthermore, through his character he must deal with the total sense of the play and not isolate the character in himself. For all these reasons, between actor and role there is no simple identification, although there is a very deep interdependence. Finally, every actor must be extremely authentic in his performance and also have some exhibitionism, but, above all, a lot of humility to let himself be carried away by the role represented and lend his person to that "other". In all this there is a clear religious and metaphysical aspect. But, above all, it shows how pertinent this dramatic structure can be for understanding the Christian life. In the three tensions expressed: materialization of a work already written; unity of technical mastery and psychological empathy; and personal experience of a role received, there is an evident parallel with a *life* received together with a *mission*.

The *director* is the one who takes in his hands the representation and its execution and shapes the unity of everything. Indeed, "between author and actor there is a gap that can only be filled by a third party, who has to take in his hands the staging, acting and representation of the play and, since there are several actors, lead them to unity and communion"[676] . This task is not easy because it demands from the director a unifying vision, within which the drama has to be executed, starting from the performance of the actors. Therefore, his task consists of a mediation service between author and actors. However, it is important to stick to a hierarchy, since first there is the author, then the actor and finally the director, who must obey the author. Now then, to represent a work means to make a plastic translation that is faithful to the deep intentionality of the author, so that it is possible to put into action - in the today of the presentation - what he himself wanted to express. With respect to the actors, the director's task is always difficult, since each artist claims his own role as the most important; that is why the director must be able to lead all of them to a hierarchical unity, according to the author's original plan. In this service of coordination, the director must let himself be led by the

author and annul himself behind the work; and, on the other hand, he must let the actors bring out the best of themselves, also annulling themselves in their respective figuration. Thus, the director, in general, must make a play present and disappear behind that same representation. Finally, it must be said that good works remain forever and only require adjustments to the horizon of meaning, but without trivializing them. An *aggiornamento* is always possible in a work, but on condition that its basic structure is maintained, otherwise the director becomes a new author.

After this brief presentation, the Trinitarian character of this first triad has become clear. The author is the Father, who has created this work, which is human history, assigning to each one the role he must play throughout his life. To this end, he has limited himself in order to allow each one to exist in his own freedom. As for the actors, among them stands out the *archetypal* actor - Christ - in whom all the others act. Now, in Christ, person and role are identified, while in all the others this identification has to be realized gradually throughout life, in a process of insertion in Christ himself. And in this process, each one must adapt to the role received, being a role that must be carried out personally and freely and that, finally, turns out to be the most proper of the personal identity, since it comes from the archetype itself, which is Christ. And the director is the Holy Spirit, who is at the service of the work of the Father and the Son in his task of making the drama unfold conveniently, being also an active protagonist, but disappearing in the person of each actor, when executing the Father's plan. It is *the kenosis* or humility of the Spirit.

2. *The three elements of realization: representation, audience and horizon.* Regarding *representation.* Every work is written -in view of the spectator- to be represented. Thus, although the spectator still knows nothing of its content, there is a relationship between him and the play through the expectation he has -implicitly before and explicitly when he already goes to the theater-. This implies that between the audience and the play there must be a certain communion for the play to work. If the play fulfills -in a broad way- the expectation, then it achieves its objective, otherwise it does not. Therefore, the audience's

attendance is necessarily active and almost ontological, because everything depends on that communion and the fulfillment of expectations. Hence, a good work always transcends the daily reality of the particular spectator, because it unveils something that goes beyond itself and the spectator: it is a true "revelation" of something existential, universal and full of meaning.

The *audience.* Theater pleases because it responds to a double need (and pleasure) of the spectators: the need for it to be a projection of oneself on a higher and definitely valid plane, and the need for it to be a welcoming of oneself from that same higher plane. It is about the desire to perceive and receive an excess of meaning, beyond the closed horizon of everyday reality. This is what is expected from a play performed. But this implies that the audience is in some way also a kind of author of the work, because it presupposes a readiness in him to let himself be swept away by the work and, with that, to flood it with a new existential meaning. This negates any possible neutral stance towards the work. But the fundamental condition, obviously, is that the scene somehow represents the world and, therefore, the public itself, so that it can see itself represented in it.

The *horizon.* In addition, there is "the irrefutable presence of a horizon, in front of which the dramatic action is represented and to which the work of the author, the performer and the audience refers"[677] . As the theater aims at more than a simple representation, since it is an attempt to understand the essence and meaning of human existence, it always refers back to the ultimate goal intended by the author, where the horizon of meaning of the whole work and the global context in which it is sustained emerges. In Antiquity, this horizon of meaning remained rather closed due to the perception of an insurmountable barrier between God and humanity; on the other hand, in the Christian context, a much greater interrelation between both actors was experienced, based on themes such as "Providence", "grace and guilt", "compromised freedoms", etc. The Christian proposal then gave a new depth to the horizon of meaning.

In this triad we again find the Trinitarian God present, but no longer in the sense that to each divine person corresponds a member of the

triad, but in the sense that the global horizon of meaning is present in the three moments. And that horizon is the trinitarian God, who acts in the drama according to the form expressed in the first triad. The *representation* made for the *public* and in which the public is personally involved is the *history of salvation* carried out by the Father, through his hands - the Son and the Spirit - as a dramatic *work of art* (Irenaeus).

The mission-vocation as a role

Here we come to the central element of Balthasar's Theo-dramatic thought and the most direct bridge between drama and theology: the similarity between the *role* or *role* of an actor and the *mission* of the Christian. In fact, biblically Jesus can be understood as the "one sent" (Rom 8:3-4; Mt 10:40), where his person is identified with his mission. The concept of mission, understood then as a task or role, which in Jesus is fully identified with his person, is also applied to the Christian, but here in the sense of a vocation received, which he must unfold throughout his life in a gradual process of appropriation of it. With this, the strict parallel between the concept of role and that of mission becomes evident, as well as the structural parallel between drama and revelation. Hence the importance of the section where Balthasar deals with the *Transition: from role to mission*[678] . In more than 150 pages of *Theodramatica* I he tries to justify the use of this concept, reviewing its strengths and limitations, and leaving for the following volumes the development of the Christological content of this theme. It will show how this theme has become particularly relevant today in psychology, sociology and biblical studies, which in some way counteracts the loss of relevance of the idea of "theater of the world" in contemporary drama. In the following, we will synthetically expose the core of Balthasar's argumentation.

Dualism experienced by every human being

First of all, he studies the context in which the question of role arises. Although "the *topos* 'theater of the world' seems to be a thing of the past insofar as it considers human life as the representation of a role before God, who is the one who distributes the tasks and judges

the representation"[679] , the idea of "role" is still very current, both in psychology and in sociology. Indeed, behind this image or concept, what is understood as "the dualism [*Dualismus*] experienced by every human being"[680] between what he represents in front of others and what he really is, remains ever topical. This means that each person can become "himself" only through other things than himself, e.g., character, other people, various circumstances that occur to him, etc. "This is the problem of all philosophy of the 'subject': 'How can the subject assimilate itself to itself'" (Blondel, *Action*)[681] . The person cannot reach himself *immediately,* since there is a kind of abyss between the self and the self. And the only point of departure is the concrete and particular, that is, "action," through which the cosmic resonates in a unique being. "Action seems to be the mediating function through which the particular and the general come into relation"[682] .

"The question to be asked is not *what* kind of being is man, but 'who am I'"[683] . Each person is alone with his destiny and in that solitude he asks himself that question. Everyone has to ask it, but each one does it in his own way. The questions of others are of no use to me, because each person has his own unrepeatable mystery, which no other person can embrace or eliminate. The mystery that each one and all the people of the world signify does not add anything to my own mystery, which is unique. Now, in every question that the human being asks himself, the *person* who is being questioned is presupposed. And the human person will never stop questioning himself because he will never stop having questions. And behind all questions is the fundamental question: who am I and why do I exist? In spite of meeting thousands of people, none of them can answer me and none of them can replace me in this questioning.

"The question is made more distressing by the fact that the individual has to trace his existence back to the most fortuitous event in the world: the sexual act of two individuals whom he has to call parents"[684] . This is an experience of every human being, the awareness that he owes his existence to something extremely casual, which could even be fortuitous. But this same "non-necessity" of his

existence leads him to pass from the intramundane to the supramundane plane, to question himself about his foundation. Indeed, his questioning makes him reflect on himself and say "I am spirit". And so he can reflect on the ultimate foundation of his life to the ultimate consequences, which will lead him to the question of *being,* to the question of the divine. This is the radical dualism or polarity that confronts every human being, which far from destroying him unfolds all his perspectives, because it shows him his openness to the transcendent and the need he has of the environment to develop as himself. This is the context where the theme of role comes in and in which the theater has a relevant word to say, as the development of current psychology and sociology proves, even with all its limitations.

Unsatisfactory solutions

In his effort to show the relevance and pertinence of drama and, in particular, of the theme of the role, Balthasar reviews some currents of thought that today especially value this argument. Basically, the fact that the role, in its relation to the free development of the person, can be seen more positively or more negatively, is raised. In some systems of thought the role is a delimitation with a rather negative character; in other cases, it is an alienation, which is not necessarily only negative; and there are also attempts that have shown its positive aspect, but they have already emerged from the Judeo-Christian biblical sphere.

1. In antiquity, as in psychology and sociology today, the role has been understood as *delimitation.* In antiquity, stoicism was important because it developed in a special way the uniqueness of the individual, since each person is unrepeatable and unmistakable. For three reasons. 1º Philosophically, in its theory of knowledge, Stoicism did not recognize universals, but only singular things. 2º These singular things were articulated as a segregation of the divine being in the world. 3º The human being participated in the divine cosmic reason, where he could "know his particular segregations of the divinity"[685] . On this assumption, each person constituted himself (1) with the historical performance of the given, as the material of Providence with which the person had to work, and with (2) his

rational freedom, with which he participated in the divine and could shape the given into a superiority worthy of his human being. In the latter, the person was also related to divine freedom in an obedience to its plan, which will vary according to the different concept of God that each one possesses. It can be seen that in many aspects Stoicism was quite close to Christianity. And there we find, in a way, that every human being is given a place in the world and a task to work at.

Nowadays, psychology is concerned with the *self* precisely when it deals with the human being as distinguished from his social *role*. But, in general, this role has been seen as a *limitation*, since in depth psychology the *self* is based, above all, on a vital background that conditions it, directs it and to which it is always referred[686] . Thus, in Freud, the human being, *roughly speaking,* lives solitarily and fractioned, in the midst of a struggle between the principle of pleasure and the principle of authority. Then, C. G. Jung tries to overcome this determinism with his doctrine of the soul, but which also leads to limitation, since "access to the totality is never achieved to such a degree that we can identify ourselves with it, that is, with the divine"[687] . This is so because, although the empirical self succeeds in transcending into the self (*Selbst*), nevertheless, that individuation achieved - as the central point of the personality - is nevertheless part of a whole that determines and limits it, and is not properly its "person." And in Alfred Adler's view, the human being "must limit himself to allowing himself to dissolve in his social role". Beyond the technical reasons of these three authors and of all depth psychology, the important issue for us is that "the idea that God may have attributed to the individual his authentic uniqueness cannot enter into his approach"[688] , either because the role or role cannot be authentically internalized, or because the self arises from the deterministic unconscious.

Sociology, on the other hand, does not ask about who I am, but about collectivity and the connection between individuals. This human science obviously assumes that each individual is an incommunicable self but must, in turn, relate to others in order to achieve fulfillment as a human being. This is where role-playing

comes in. Now, whether one thinks that man begins where his role ends and then the role alienates the person (Kant), or whether one thinks that the person does not exist in himself, but is a pure role (Hegel), there is a diastasis between person and role that constitutes precisely the sociology of roles. The person would be the result of a play of roles. And the legitimizing instance of roles would be society, which is both human product and objective reality. Thus, in society, each person internalizes his or her various roles as his or her own, in such a way as to make them something specific and individual. In this way, each person determines his or her understanding of the world as a meaningful and social reality with both institutional and subjective elements. This is the context in which the freedom of each person develops, which, despite its possibilities, is fundamentally limited because its ultimate referent is only human sociability. And without authentic freedom it is not possible to develop a drama.

2. The role can also be seen as *alienation.* Balthasar examines it at two key moments: (1) in Antiquity and the Middle Ages, which uphold the idea of the "return" to essence in God; and (2), of course, in idealism. In classical philosophy, culminating with Plotinus, all being hopes to find its authenticity in union with the *One*, since the manifold is ambiguous and transitory. Things exist better and more truly in God than in themselves. Thus, each being finds its unmistakable singularity in the unrepeatable One, but it is an encounter that implies losing individual identity. This idea - although Christianized - runs through the whole of scholasticism, affirming that, *in* God, the existing being possesses not only a real and true being, but also a more sublime and eminent one. Then, Meister Eckhart (†1328) took this to its extreme point, attempting to do away with "the difference between the being ('ideal') of the creature in God and its being ('real') in itself"[689] . For the Master, God being simply *Being*, nothing can exist outside of God. The existential consequence was that we had to empty ourselves of everything so that only Christ (= God) could remain in us. But "everything" meant also the personal and individual properties, so that only what Christ has assumed from us remains. That would be, in truth, the authentic man because he has

lost the individual. It is an absolute depersonalization, at the service of Christ. But is it really an "I" that which is no longer distinguished in any way from God?

We know that Eckhart was one of the mediators between Neoplatonic antiquity and modern idealism, since in the question of the self, which interests us here, "we find in various degrees and forms the same tendency to make the personal empirical self dissolve into the 'essential', 'the ideal', so that here too we must speak of 'alignment'"[690] . "For none of the idealists the question is the flight from the world, but on the contrary, its penetration and mastery, as never before projected in such a consistent, even titanic way. That is why the result is more transcendental: the loss, suffered as if by neglect, of the individual as a person"[691] . Indeed, although the self, starting from its consciousness, makes itself in freedom and knowledge, and is what it has become, thanks to the fact that it has made itself such; nevertheless, this knowledge of itself has been verified only in the perfect integration of the singular in the totality of the spirit, as its truth. Thus, in Hegel, the singularity of the individual is not denied, but "the normative criterion is the 'universal individual,' in whose substantial morality the particular individuals have already integrated their true freedom"[692] . Therefore, this conception of individuality unfortunately alienates the person, since in its offering by the totality the self is not assumed as such, but decays to be only an "insignificant moment"[693] .

3. Balthasar also considers some proposals, which he understands as positive attempts at *mediation* between person and role, which although not entirely satisfactory, do show the importance of the theme and the fact that the role is considered in some way an integral part of the person. He presents four attempts - two pre-Christian and two post-Christian - which are more positive responses compared to those that spoke of alienation and delimitation. The two pre-Christian ones are the figures of the king and the genius. The peoples of the Middle East saw in the *king* a figure who offered an answer for the members of his own people about "who am I". His presence in the midst of the community - as God's representative - was basically

indicating who that community and each of its members were. Together they formed a kind of global person with an identity coming from the king. But that identity also had its problematics. "The representation of God is a form of identification of his self, but of an extraordinary, supramundane self, where the rest remains indeterminate in the mass"[694] . The other pre-Christian form was the theory of the *genius* or *daimon,* which is the presence of a god assigned to man as companion and protector. Each person has a particular one and "it is by definition a principle that surpasses in dignity the mortal being of the individual"[695] . But that principle always remains foreign to man, it cannot be fully identified with the self and is not properly, neither God, nor something authentically mine, my own. Here are two pre-Christian modes of response which, in their proposal about the meaning of a unique and personal role, leave us unsatisfied.

The two post-Christian attempts are much more profound and elaborate. The first is *the individual law,* developed by "a thinker who in the whole of his work has fought for a modern expression of individuality understood as the absolutely unrepeatable and who, in all attempts to answer the question 'who am I', deserves special attention: Georg Simmel"[696] . But his solution is not completely satisfactory because it suffers from an abstraction (through integration into the whole and a return to concentration on the singular) that does not allow him to adequately value the interpersonal[697] ; something that is achieved by four other authors who speak of the "*dialogical principle*" and who, with them, are at the gates of biblical revelation: Ferdinand Ebner, Martin Buber, Gabriel Marcel and Franz Rosenzweig.

Thus we find that the positive and truly adequate answer to the question of who I am, in the end, could only be given by the vertical action of biblical revelation: "only in the 'name' with which God addresses the singular man is he validly and definitively different from any other; he is no longer a generic individual but an unrepeatable person. On the other hand, in the philosophical field "insofar as it strives to make the I a person thanks to the thou, it can no longer provide that precise information"[698] . Therefore, this I-Thou encounter remains casual and in each encounter a new name is given to me,

which implies that finally the question of who I am remains unanswered. Only the eternal Thou ensures that communication is never destroyed. For Rosenzweig, in the world - as a system - there are "things," but not properly "you"; and yet the person, as an "I," can and must desire that an authentic You - God - love him. And since his "I" is opaque and mute, he is waiting for a liberating word from God. And only when it is called upon by God does the "I" recognize its brother as "another I" - who is the same as I am - called upon in his absolute singularity, just as I am. In this way the proper name is no longer arbitrary, but is the name that God has given me in creation. The human being is the pure receptivity and availability of the self to the word of God.

Definitive solution in Christ

The dialogical principle has left us at the door of the transfer from the role to the mission, that is, of the passage to the personal vocation of each one, and with it, to the development of all the rest of the *Theodramatic,* which is properly theological and no longer only instrumental. Balthasar himself gathers the content of *Theodramatica* I in a synthetic paragraph:

> Suffice it to say that after the intricate journey of this "transition" we have arrived where it was supposed to lead us: "from paper to sending". The direction of the path was marked by the question "who am I?"; it was necessary to leave the arbitrary character of the "role" deposited as a casual garment on the back of a colorless self, at any moment interchangeable by another; and this to reach an "I" that does not admit exchange and that is therefore qualified as the bearer of a truly dramatic role in the field not of the theater, but of existence. Without having found this unique "name" (Rosenzweig) of the individual called by God and endowed with his own name, without having found the man who does not admit exchange, the "absolute unique case" (Ebner), we would not have dared to approach a theodramatic, because the *partner* for the unique and unrepeatable God would not have been present. It is not surprising that this *partner* should make his appearance when he enters the domain of biblical theology, precisely by going beyond the approaches of mysticism, philosophy, psychology and sociology; he is already a product and an element of a drama which, in our opinion, unfolds only in the sphere of the Bible and which, for its part, will be able to continue to unfold for those who seriously act in the company of God . [699]

Now, this proper name signifies a *mission,* which only in Jesus is given in an absolute identification between person and mission, since he is "the" one sent, he is the mission itself. This had already been

expressed by St. Thomas, when he understands the intradivine processions as identical to the extra-divine missions. The missions of the Son and the Spirit reflect the intra-trinitarian generation and procession of the Spirit. Now, "in the identity of person and mission in Christ, the duality of being and appearing that runs through the whole human structure is overcome in an absolutely unrepeatable way," but in such a way that it does not eliminate it, but rather assumes it in a superior unity, since "in the humanity of Jesus" this duality "is included in all its significance"[700] . And the Holy Spirit, who always acts between the Father and the Son, prevents this mission from being heteronomous, since he shows the Son the will of the Father and leads him from within. And the same will happen with the human being: the Holy Spirit will transform this role -mission/vocation- into the most profound and identifying identity of the person. But these are themes that must be studied specifically and are the arguments that Balthasar will develop in depth later in his work, particularly in his *Theodramática* and in the last two vols. of the *Theologica* .[701]

Critical points of this attempt

To attempt a theodramatics is a major undertaking - requiring a great deal of literary and theological competence - and one that Balthasar has accomplished here in a very remarkable way. That is why it has been so well received and has received a very positive evaluation in its theological reception. All in all, some questions arise that it is good to take up. In the first place, what is the real usefulness of exposing all this abundant dramatic instrumentation as it has been done in this volume of *Prolegomena?* The question becomes more pressing when we perceive that, from vol. II of the *Theodramatica* onwards, practically all mention of this rich instrumentality disappears and it is not so clear how he has integrated it into the rest of the work. Reading in more detail, both the *Prolegomena* and the rest of the *Theodramatica*, we can try to find an answer. The intention of the introductory volume does not seem to be so directly to present either a strict outline or each of the concepts that he will necessarily use in the volumes that follow to describe the development of the history of

salvation; but rather, to introduce the reader to the world of drama, so that he understands the global horizon of all drama, beyond dwelling on its particular details. In this way, the reader will have an adequate horizon of understanding to interpret the revelation from the dramatic categories, which will focus especially on three: interrelation of freedoms, mission and dramatic action (hence the introductory volume concludes with the more extensive development of the theme of role/mission). So, while it is perfectly valid to question the real need for such a lengthy volume to give only a contextual introduction, it seems to me that this responds well to the method Balthasar uses throughout his work: he precedes all important statements with a broad history of the concept, the questions it raises, the attempts to answer it, and the development of its understanding. What is normally presented as a "history of dogma" (such as the history of the concept of grace, of the person, etc.), in this case is presented as a "rich panorama" of the dramatic answers to existential problems. This also helps the reader to get up to date with a literary and dramatic history that he or she has not usually been able to get acquainted with before. In that sense, the volume is perfectly justified and deeply appreciated.

Thinking now properly about the project of understanding revelation as a Theo-dramatic, a second question arises, which points to the very core of the attempt: it is a question about that matrix idea of understanding human and Christian history as a theological drama, that is, as a relationship between God and the human being, where to some extent, the role and destiny of the person would have already been decided in Christ. This could mean a certain devaluation of history itself or of the possibilities of history towards the future, since history, as such, would be subordinated to an already determined structure, which would be precisely that Theo-drama. This could make it something "immutable". And, furthermore, if the role supposes and demands a complete "indifference" (= Ignatian) on the part of the subject in order to be able to execute this role personally and freely, does not all this perhaps call into question the priority of the subject, one's own initiative and the real possibilities of history?[702] . It is true that this is a question that can be adequately answered only once each

of these arguments and questions has been set out in detail in Balthasar himself, so that here we can only suggest a first, rather general, though exact, answer. Synthetically, I do not think that this question can *necessarily* be deduced from what Balthasar said, but such an interpretation can indeed be given if *all* the elements of his theology are not taken into account. It seems to me that, if one looks at the totality of Balthasar's work and the internal relations between all his themes, one must object to both questions (both the devaluation of history and the devaluation of the subject), although they will always be a threat to be exorcised in this and in any theology that wants to be systematic. For Balthasar, history, in spite of having its *eschatological* destiny already defined, continues to be truly open in its future possibilities, and in it there is always an authentic play of freedoms, with moments of hard apocalyptic struggle and even with the possibility of eternal damnation (which is the extreme of freedom), showing with that all the seriousness that for the human being entails its openness to the future. For this very reason, Balthasar does not agree with those theologies that speak of an "indefinite" progress of history-whether partial or total-precisely because they tend to de-dramatize history, making it lose its openness. And with regard to "indifference", Balthasar clearly does not understand it in the sense of *freezing* the subject, but precisely as placing all responsibility in his decision, in his discernment and in his own activity. Once again we have here the theme of God's abasement or *kenosis*, which leaves the human being free *in* his finitude. Therefore, *Theodramatics* must be understood, in the first place, from the interrelation between freedoms and not from a structure superimposed on history. This is what does justice to such a systematic system and allows us to understand it authentically. In any case, it is always good to keep this danger in mind when thinking of history as a Theo-dramatic.

From here a final question arises: faced with a history that is a Theo-drama, where, in a certain sense, that drama, in its fundamental aspect, has already occurred, does that not end any deeper commitment to the transformation of the world and to the struggle for justice in the present moment?[703] . This questioning may even be

accentuated by the fact that Balthasar runs abundantly through the whole history of drama and literature, but is much less strong in sociological studies and other contemporary sciences. And that is coupled, moreover, with a constant absence of any mention of the exact sciences and other contemporary scientific expressions. I believe that, with respect to the latter, we are faced with the limitations inherent to any work, which necessarily cannot cover everything. And with regard to the - more important - concern for justice, it is not a theme that Balthasar minimizes at all, on the contrary, for him, "the struggle for the very visible political and economic action for social justice in the world (as claimed by 'liberation theology') forms an essential part of the tasks of the Church in the world, tasks that, together with others, make her the *Sacramentum mundi* [= sign and instrument for the world]"[704] . And we must also affirm that Balthasar does not forget - nor does he neglect - intramundane development. He has amply demonstrated this in all his works referring to the lay commitment to the world, including the foundation of the St. John Community. But it is also true that he especially emphasized the fact that it is God who acts in history, and that history does not end in an unworldly way, but is open to eternity. His criticism of intrahistorical messianism must also be understood in this context. In all this there will always be different sensibilities and appreciations -all valid-, in a vital tension -horizontal-vertical- that must be maintained, and that Balthasar, it seems to me, maintains adequately. His theology of history, precisely because it has a strongly Christological and "vertical" character, is a commitment to the development of the world, but always with "the Gospel first"[705] .

Finally, the presentation of all these dramatic instruments must be understood as a *hermeneutical* aid to understand the revelation of the Absolute, which will always be greater, more mysterious and more profound than any attempt at synthesis and human understanding. But every effort to understand this mystery a little more deeply is appreciated, appreciated and is a help for contemporary faith.

VI. Philosophy underlying Balthasar's theology

Balthasar's characteristic approach to philosophy.

Explanation of their own approach to philosophy

We know that Balthasar received his doctorate in Germanistics, and in those early studies -in his doctoral thesis- he dedicated a chapter to the alternative between Kierkegaard and Nietzsche[706] and, at the end of his studies in the Society of Jesus -ten years later-, he reworked that same thesis, but extending it to three volumes, in which now appear monographic studies of Lessing, Herder, Kant, Schiller, Fichte, Schelling, Novalis, Hölderlin, Goethe, Jean Paul, Hegel, Hebbel, Wagner, Kierkegaard, Bergson, Hofmannsthal, Spitteler, Nietzsche, Dostojewskij, Scheler, Heidegger, Rilke, Karl Barth and Bloch, among others[707] . There, he already hinted at something, which will become characteristic of his style of work: monographic studies that, as a whole, show tendencies of thought. On the other hand, during his time of formation in the Order, he had two years of philosophy studies in Pullach (Munich), of which he did not have good memories, but he did have the invaluable help of E. Przywara, who showed him St. Thomas in the totality of his work and taught him to confront him with modern thinkers, whether Hegel, Scheler or Heidegger[708] . And during his four years of theology studies, he devoted much of his time to reading the Fathers of the Church, where he also published some anthologies and studies on them, especially his works on Origen, Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus the Confessor[709] , which contained a special concern for "the philosophical aspects of their work"[710] . In those years he made his own the concept of philosophy proper to patristics, and in particular, he valued -interiorly- the Platonic structure, which was predominantly assumed by the Christianity of the first centuries[711] , which sustains a profound unity -not without dangers- between natural and supernatural, that is, between philosophy and theology[712] . From this academic journey, we have to

affirm that -technically- Balthasar is not strictly speaking a philosopher, however, from his first writings his concern for philosophy and the study of its authors clearly appears. Indeed, in his reflection on culture and, later, in his theological contributions, there are present, from the beginning, both the fundamental philosophical questions of the history of humanity, as well as the serious attempt to take charge of its central themes. In fact, throughout his life he wrote several purely philosophical works, and his theology and literature were always impregnated with philosophical reflections, questions and contributions. Balthasar, like every authentic systematic theologian, has a clear and profound philosophical substratum that orients him and that he takes charge of.

From his studies, and already reflected in his first works, Balthasar adopted his own form and methodology, which were characteristic for his understanding of philosophy as such, as well as its relationship with theology and culture. In two articles - at a distance of 20 years from each other - we can see his rather broad concept of philosophy, which, by the way, he recognizes as present in the history of Western thought. In the second of these, an article from 1960[713] , he conceives philosophy as a fundamental attitude of one's own life. There he affirms that "in the time of the Fathers and still in the Middle Ages, the ancient Church presented monastic life as Christian philosophy", an idea that already came from Hellenism, where "the philosopher coincided more and more with the theologian, with the speculator on divinity"[714] . Indeed, in Antiquity, the philosopher dedicated his life to the search for the divine, which implied also searching for/finding his happiness and acquiring wisdom, which would later be reflected in his practical life, and therefore was not exempt from an ascetic and contemplative experience. With this Hellenic idea of philosophy, it was not difficult for the Fathers of the Church, from Justin onwards, to have presented Christianity as a true - indeed, the only true - "philosophy"[715] and, later, to have seen in monasticism a "philosophical" way of life. "Thus, both in medieval and ancient monasticism 'philosophy' does not primarily mean a theory in the modern sense, or a technique of knowledge, but a wisdom manifested

in life, a reasonable way of living"[716] . Hence it was later concluded that "the philosopher without more and the synthesis of all philosophy is Christ: ipsa *philosophia Christus* (Rochais)" (= Christ is philosophy in person) .[717]

Now, for Balthasar, all this in no way means an undervaluation of philosophy as a science with academic rigor, but, on the contrary, what he wants to show - in this text - by resorting to this classic fact, is that philosophy, as an academic science, as a thorough investigation and with a precise method, cannot fail to ask itself about the totality of reality. And that means asking about the ultimate meaning of things and, at the end of it all, asking about God, the foundation of reality, regardless of the answer that is then offered to all this. Balthasar recognizes that this idea -as such- is not realized today, nor would it be accepted in a university environment[718] , but that it is still present, insofar as humanity, in its different philosophies and/or religions, is aware of the expiration of human life and, therefore, tries to explain it and present some ways of solution or, at least, of acceptance or coexistence with it. All this means - in the last analysis - authentic efforts to explain human reality in the context of the totality of existence, that is to say, philosophy. It matters neither the manner nor the terminology used, because, in any case, any search for truth or for an elucidation of the human being or of reality as a totality, encounters the question of "where we come from" and "where we are going" (it is the old scheme of Plotinus, of the departure from the One and the return to the One). Hence Christian thought, with its teaching about creation - as the origin of everything - and of the eschatology - as the final goal of everything - and in the middle of which is the following of Christ - as the path from the origin to the end -, is part of the answers, which we can also call "philosophical", to the deepest question of human life. But, in addition, Balthasar, as we have already mentioned, at the end of his life affirmed with acrimony: "no philosophy will be able to give a satisfactory answer to this question [...] The true answer to philosophy can only be given by Being itself, revealing itself starting from itself"[719] . This is Balthasar's suggestive interpretation of this first and broad *existential* meaning of philosophy,

which he assumes not in order to escape from a more academic philosophy, but precisely to take it to its maximum scientific and vital expression.

In the other article - earlier in time: 1939[720] - Balthasar refers here more directly to the internal unity between philosophy and theology that has taken place in the history of Christianity. In the text he wants to "outline the 'structural law' of what is 'essentially Christian' in each of the three historical forms Christianity has taken: patristic, medieval scholastic and modern"[721] . And in developing this theme, he indirectly shows the profound unity that - in a more general way - occurs in the whole history of thought between theology and philosophy. First, he justifies this work by exposing his fundamental method that will always accompany him:

> We will have to penetrate through the external and secondary properties of each epoch to its most intimate structural law and evaluate this structural law with the structural law of the Christian, as it is found in the Gospel [...] Insofar as the general idea of the Christian becomes legible only from the totality of its possible realizations, to the same extent an order of meaning and rank is also given in these realizations. This is already valid due to the fact that all history is a happening, it possesses a tendency. Therefore, we must try to understand the meaning of the great epochs both in isolation and in their context. In the first aspect we will discover the uniqueness and with it also the permanence of its meaning and its exemplarity, in the second its ordering in the total context and thus its surpassability and transience .[722]

Here Balthasar's tireless search -which has become his method- to discover the fundamental lines of the history of thought and to see in the singular realizations both the concreteness of the totality and the particularity that builds that same totality is clearly manifested. In the text we are reviewing, he applied the method to the search for "the structural law of the Christian", but later, in *Gloria* IV-V -when he presents *In the space of metaphysics*-, he will apply it to what we could call the presence of "theological aesthetics in European spiritual history"[723] . Now, in this text of 1939, he exposes this "structural law of the Christian" precisely on the basis of the *metaphysics* that sustains the fundamental religious thought of each of the three moments studied, thus indicating, once again, the profound interweaving of philosophy and theology. Indeed, for Balthasar, the deepest longing of the human being is to resemble God - and even to identify with him -

but in the measure in which he approaches him, his ever greater dissimilarity to God appears more and more clearly to him. The more we know God, the more we realize that we are *not-God*, we are what God is *not* and God is what we are *not*. And yet, this very and profound existential paradox of the human being is precisely what opens to humanity the possibility of a love of/for God. "Only where there is non-identity is love possible. And it is absolutely false that love desires the suppression of personality, that it desires to *be* the you"[724] . And, on the other hand, if this is the usual human movement, the order of salvation is precisely the inverse: it is the free and gratuitous *descent* of God towards man, that is, the incarnation of the Word to bring man closer and make him like God, without him losing his own reality before God. "In this way what is Christian really appears most clearly in the formula *gratia non destruit sed perficit naturam*" (= grace does *not* destroy, but perfects nature)[725] . Here is expressed concretely what Balthasar will say later -which we have already mentioned- about Christian revelation as an answer to the fundamental questions of philosophy. This is the conviction that is at the basis of the present reflection.

Balthasar notes that this structural law of Christianity has come into contact with diverse cultures, languages, worldviews and perspectives throughout history, each of which has its own characteristics, but also its own limitations. And, therefore, the Church, in making use of them, has entered into a tension that is inevitable, but which must be made explicit on the basis of four criteria that are especially important: (1) Every worldview, even if it is not a believing one, "is in advance in a context of the world that is supernatural. For the whole of humanity is ordered to a uniquely supernatural end"[726] . On the other hand, (2) the fact that a culture comes into contact with Christianity does not exempt it from its moment of sin and even paganism. (3) This will also influence the Christian proposal which, in each historical moment, will be marked by these same limitations. However, (4) the Church can learn the lesson and gradually develop its dogma, not without difficulties, marches and counter-marches.

These four points of view should be in view of anyone who undertakes the attempt to explain the relationship of an epoch of thought with the total meaning of Christianity. It is

always a labile and plurisignificant relationship; the conquest of a worldly formula will rarely be obtained without a decadence in it, but also in the worldly formula a Christian nucleus can be hidden .[727]

With this methodology, Balthasar discovers in the three epochs he is studying - and this is what interests us here - how in each of them the same structural law of Christianity is expressed but from *the peculiar philosophical coordinates* proper to the worldview and culture of each of the epochs. Thus, in patristics, Neoplatonism is assumed, above all, with all its richness and its dangers, since the God-world relationship is understood on the basis of the concept of participation: "the world is essentially that which participates, [and] God [is] that which is participated"[728] . This scheme of thought implied, however, the danger of pantheism, never completely overcome in patristics. Scholasticism - the second moment studied - on the other hand, beginning with Aristotle, tried to correct this danger by clarifying that the relationship between God and the world is rather a relationship of cause and effect and a relationship of finality. This avoided the danger of pantheistic emantism and affirmed an autonomous nature in the face of a God who was the foundation of all creation. Nevertheless, this new scheme could hide the inverse danger of conceiving a "pure nature" in which the supernatural would have an extrinsic character. Here we are very close to the danger of conceiving reality as separated into "two floors", with a natural zone and a supernatural zone. Finally, modernity brought a new element from the progressive valuation, both of the individual and of the concrete in itself; and a little later, with the further development of the concept of person in the personal-actualistic sense. When both elements are united and applied to the relationship of the Creator with the creature, the autonomy of the natural, on the one hand, and, at the same time, its intrinsic dependence on its Creator, on the other, are further emphasized.

This journey has shown us, concretely, two things: the method Balthasar applies and the necessary interweaving of philosophy and theology. And with that, Balthasar also exposes his true ultimate motivation:

In this way, finally, *our task* is predesigned. Avoiding all the unilateralisms that preferentially look backward, we have to realize the total sense of the Christian as the

interior sense of our time demands. This total sense must certainly strive with all its strength to make itself visible, in the face of a predominant naturalism, to the fundamental law of "dying" and of "dying passing over" to the new redeemed world .[729]

We have dwelt on this text because it seems to us that it expresses, right from the beginning of Balthasar's intellectual life, a very precise way of facing his theological work, which expresses, as we have already said repeatedly, his personal conception of a philosophy radically integrated in the history of culture and, above all, in the religious aspect of culture and, therefore, integrated with theology as a science.

Characteristics of his approach to philosophy

From the above it can be deduced that Balthasar approaches philosophy on the basis of two distinctive features. The first of these is the search for a global outlook. Indeed, in these general historical studies he has not sought to elaborate a philosophical "system" or to ascribe himself to a "school" of thought, but rather to offer a total look, showing the fundamental direction of the movement of ideas in the course of history; as has also been his usual style in dealing with many of the great theological themes throughout the *Trilogy*. But neither is it a history of philosophy. One could better say that it is a *phenomenological* look that tries to discover the global perspective (*Weltanschauung*) of each system or person studied, in such a way as to be able to understand the articulating axes of each thought and, from them, to reconstruct the great historical and thought forces that have carried forward the path of humanity. It is a matter of showing the great historical-spiritual movements that have influenced the processes of the world, the great quests and intuitions of humanity and its fundamental orientations[730] . For this reason, in the exposition of his themes and authors, although he is very clear about where he wants to go, and he goes there step by step -showing authors and themes-, he lets the texts, people and events speak for themselves, thus giving a great richness and vitality to his exposition, which deeply and honestly respects the contribution of each person and time. P. Henrici describes it this way: "The genesis of his philosophy [is...] to let oneself be instructed by the great and by their spiritual

adventures, at the same time, however, under the distant light of a theological point of reference or rather, in conformity with faith, to preserve the spiritual freedom to think otherwise, even to think the opposite"[731] .

And the second characteristic -already basically exposed- is the aforementioned integration of philosophy-theology, which underlies as the basic structure of all his work. We have seen, in the first chapter, that Balthasar started from the principle "without philosophy, there is no theology"[732] . Therefore, the theologian should always begin "immersed - precisely in the light of revelation - in the mysterious structures of created being"[733] . This meant that "the Christian [was] the man who [had] to philosophize from faith. Since he believes in God's absolute love for the world, he must read being in its ontological difference as a sign of love and live according to this principle"[734] . Thus, the task was "integration," that is, "a rigorous collaboration between philosophy and theology"[735] , which requires that "both disciplines [be] intrinsically open to each other"[736] . And he expounded, in *Gloria* IV, at the beginning of the section *In the Space of Metaphysics,* the meaning of this "integration":

> Perhaps from this quick glance we can understand why we wish to define our method as one of *integration* and not of evolution. The latter is nowadays preferred: everything is sacrificed for the new, rejecting the old [...] But since Christianity, in order to be understood, must be healthily linked to its historical origin, which never allows itself to be embraced by genial improvisations tailored to the "needs of modern man", but only by humble listening in the Holy Spirit to the original word, the Christian should also have a sense of human tradition, which must be integrated, precisely when the way to the future has to be found: the way from the still implicit totality (with its balances) to the explicit totality (with its counterbalanced, but not rejected balances)[737] .

This method of integration is not a cumulative grouping of all that is true in the different historical forms of thought, be it philosophical, cultural, literary, dramatic, etc. It is not a matter of collecting in order to acquire an encyclopedic knowledge, but rather it has the objective of welcoming all the seeds of the Word deposited there, but in order, with them, to make explicit and explain the Christian revelation; since all intellectual works are elaborated by the human being himself - who is the image of God, according to the Letters to the Ephesians and Colossians (Eph 1 and Col 1), having been created "in Christ" - in such

a way that his systems of thought must also reflect, in some way, that same divine image. He developed this theme further in a 1946 paper: *The Task of Catholic Philosophy in Our Time*[738] , in which he reaffirms the importance of this method for theology:

> The advantages for it would be almost incalculable, for, although theology thinks and develops from its own preconditions, it makes use at every step of human-philosophical forms of perception and results of research. But the broader this base and the material available, the more means theology has to develop. She is stimulated, encouraged, enriched almost reluctantly by every step forward in the philosophy. The more abundantly nature unfolds, the more material the supernatural possesses in it to transform, elevate and grow .[739]

Evidently all this is not an easy task and it also has many dangers, both of a comfortable eclecticism or syncretism, and of a twisted use of the data found, and even of a falsification of the doctrines studied; in the end, it is prone to an underhanded intellectual dishonesty. Nevertheless, Balthasar openly exposes his method, is aware of its risks and applies himself rigorously -with intellectual honesty- to the task he has explicitly declared. And that protects him from disloyalty. On the other hand, he is not the only author who has walked this path. We can recall a long list of good philosophers and theologians who likewise sought to read the ancient authors from the new currents of thought. Let us remember, for example, the wide posterity of Plato - in which Plotinus stands out-, who reads him from the new ideas of Late Antiquity; or Dionysius, who rereads Proclus from Christian revelation; or in the last century, where a Marechal or a Rahner tried to understand and expound Thomas from transcendental philosophy; to cite some of the best known cases. But Balthasar goes even further: his originality lies in the realization of a broader reading of a *whole* cultural universe (in this case, of the long history of Western European thought) in the light of this principle of integration, and this is his greatest virtue, as well as his greatest danger.

And as for the difficulties of this task, its greatest stumbling block does not arise with the study of pagan philosophy, open to the divine - to the Greek "*Theion*" - nor, even less, with Christian philosophy itself, which is in itself open to the revelation from on high. In this, Balthasar follows, in a certain way, the path already trodden by the

Fathers of the Church and the medieval authors. The most acute problem presents itself to him with the study of modern philosophy, which is on the opposite path, that is, it has taken Christianity and secularized it. Let us think, for example, of Hegel ("religion is knowledge of the spirit about itself as spirit"[740]). In this new context it becomes more difficult to determine *precisely* its openness to Christianity. But, on the other hand, this philosophy is still explicitly linked to Christian thought - albeit as a more secular form of revelation - in such a way that the understanding of these authors, rather, would only entail *a greater* exercise of discernment, in order to find the essence of this Christian truth present there because, in spite of everything, it is still "open" to Christianity. But we will return to this subject a little later. In short, the integration between philosophy and theology and the use of all the seeds of the Word to construct his own Christian synthesis, in the words of E. Bauer, "constitute in the end the foundation of his great trilogy and of his multiple humanistic incursions"; although, for the same author, "both [aspects] also lead him to a superficial integration or 'baptism' of elements of the system, in themselves suspect"[741] . In any case, although this affirmation needs first to be proven, it does not eliminate the undeniable fact that E. Bauer is right in affirming that this "integration" is the structuring method of Balthasar'*s Trilogy*.

Specific philosophical texts in Balthasar's work

Broad themes developed in the Trilogy

1. In the previous chapters, especially in the first one, we have alluded to the most relevant authors and philosophers whose influence has been greater in Balthasar; as well as, in the second chapter, we have mentioned the philosophical themes that most interest Balthasar, as well as their specific contributions and particular characteristics, although all this has been in a very synthetic way. In that same second chapter, it was also possible to appreciate the structuring, starting from the transcendentals of being, of his entire *Trilogy*. We cannot repeat here what has already been said. We refer to those chapters.

2. On the other hand, it is clear that the most fundamental

elaboration, as a synthesis of his thought and as a global view of the development of philosophy, is to be found in vols. 4 and 5 of *Gloria,* in the extensive section *In the Space of Metaphysics,* which we have also briefly presented in chapter two. We cannot now return to those pages, nor present a new summary of those two volumes. The invitation is to read these two volumes directly, where one will find articulated a sort of "walk of metaphysics", not in the classical manner of a history of philosophy, but from the perspective of the presence (or not) of a metaphysical aesthetics throughout the history of Western European thought, where the essential contributions of the most important authors are mentioned. However, it is necessary and important to underline here the purpose of these two volumes and their particular philosophical perspective from a theological aesthetics.

For Balthasar, the universality of biblical glory, as a revelation of the ever greater God, must necessarily meet with that other universality, already present in the world of creation and perceptible to every human being, which is the presence of the *being* of all things, that is, of their beauty. Therefore, a theology cannot exist without constant reference to metaphysics, understood in the broad sense of being the understanding of the origin of things and of their reality as beautiful, good and true. A biblical concept without a relationship with created reality would have no meaning for the creature[742] . Hence our author wants to show the unity that exists - in fact - between an adherence to Christ, as the revealer of the Father, and a universal adherence to the whole metaphysical-religious truth of humanity[743] , because in the very "human structure [there is] a pre-understanding"[744] of the revelation of the Word made flesh. For this, as we have mentioned above, Balthasar needs a method or way of access. In the introduction to this metaphysical section he indicates:

> We are looking for a point of support that will serve as a reference point or absolute principle. This principle must be characterized by allowing the greatest communication in all directions, avoiding any spiritual compromise. It must take seriously what in other recommendable points of view, partial because of their radicalisms, must be taken seriously, without allying itself with their partialisms. The unity made possible, and even prescriptive in Christianity, between a decision of faith regarding divine revelation in Christ and a universal affirmation of all metaphysical-religious truth, is by itself unique. And it cannot be

demonstrated externally, but only in its experiential praxis .[745]

With this he presented the "absolute principle" or "point of support" that will accompany the writing of these two long volumes. It is a principle from which the truth of religious mythology and philosophy, as well as of biblical revelation, can be shown, and which is capable of embracing the totality of Christianity - in all its aspects - and, above all, it is a principle that is not blind in the face of the glory of God. Only a "point of support" with these characteristics will allow the Christian "to realize and live the inalienable ontic experience, thus becoming a responsible guardian of the glory in the universal sense"[746] . It is -evidently- about the already mentioned principle of "integration", but which implies that the nucleus of revelation can only be perceived by the one who "abandons himself 'disinterestedly' to the love of God, who reveals himself, gives himself and empties himself, [and] 'renders honor' to God only for this love and understands himself only in function of this honor", because "God in the creation of the world could have no other object than the manifestation of his own 'glory'"[747] . Hence, Balthasar's whole quest concentrates on finding that glory of God, transparent in the beauty-goodness-truth of all human expression, as we have already indicated in the previous chapters. Thus, aesthetics being part of metaphysics -insofar as it is a science of the being of the entity- and understanding, here, being as that founding element of the multiplicity of the world, then, in this sense, metaphysics is inseparable from theology because the beautiful is anchored in the absolute and transcendent beautiful.

On the other hand, "being" becomes perceptible only in its *determinate* and *concrete* being - a form - that is, in "a totality of parts and elements, conceived as such, limited and supported in itself, which, however, for its consistency, needs not only an 'environment', but ultimately being in its totality, and in this necessity is a 'contractive' representation of the 'absolute' [...], insofar as in its closed field it transcends and dominates the parts in which it is articulated"[748] . Thus, the *Gestalt* (= form) always refers back to the luminous mystery of being in its totality and, therefore, to the cause of it. This "form" can be an event, a person, a thing, and every event that

expresses the wonder of being, and, through which, the revelation of God can then also be presented. This makes beauty available for revelation and, therefore, metaphysics is open to theology, thereby justifying not only a theological aesthetics, but also its study "in the space of metaphysics." That is the aim of these two wonderful and certainly necessary volumes to read: to show the openness of metaphysics to the revelation of the glory of God.

3. Another important philosophical moment in the *Trilogy* is *Theology* I, a volume that we have already presented and briefly summarized in chapter two. The suggestion -again here- is to read directly this text, originally written in 1947, and taken up again, without any correction, as the first volume of this third part of the *Trilogy*. Written, unlike the other volumes, practically without quoting any author -which does not mean that he does not know them or does not use them-. This shows us that it is a "distillate" of his epistemological thought, after many years of study and good knowledge of Western philosophical development. It could perfectly be considered as a kind of "introduction" to philosophical epistemology -presented in the form of a "phenomenology of truth"[749] -, but it is still more than that, because its concern is not merely epistemological but, in the first place, ontological; and its formal object is truth, where it is not interested in offering a theory of knowledge, properly speaking. It is a work "thoroughly reflected and, in the background, in constant dialogue, especially with Thomas Aquinas and Heidegger"[750] . For Balthasar, just as with metaphysics, so also for epistemology there is a "pre-understanding already in the structures of intramundane truth"[751] for the understanding of the truth revealed by Christ in the Holy Spirit. But his attempt is neither a manual - although it could very well serve as such - nor a mere critique of knowledge, but much more profoundly, it is "a metaphysical interpretation of the inner fullness of the truth of the worldly being, whose inexhaustible richness is only developed in dealing with the truth"[752] . Indeed, for Balthasar, "to speak of truth" means, first of all, to affirm that *there is* something we can call "truth," and that is precisely the task of the critique of knowledge *and* ontology, since "truth is not only an attribute of

knowledge but first and foremost a transcendental determination of being as such"[753] . "All the great philosophers were convinced of this breadth and this inexhaustible richness of truth"[754] . It should not be forgotten that this is the first volume of the third part of his *Trilogy, that* is, its theme is the *transcendental* truth.

Now, if truth is to be treated as a transcendental, then it must follow the path of metaphysics. This has an originating point of departure (the wonder that something [= I and others] exists) which, however, remains insurmountable throughout life because, even if, from one's own self-consciousness, one has understood what being is (the fact of existing), one still has to return - again and again - to that same self-consciousness - as in a kind of spiral - which makes one go deeper and deeper into who one is and who the others are. Thus, each new manifestation of the question of being is always an intensification of the original question, which also allows for a deepening of the original answer. The same, then, must occur with truth: its discovery -devel-velation- postulates an identical development, from a first -necessary-preunderstanding of what truth is, to a deepening, each time to a greater and greater degree, of what it means. Truth, as transcendental of being, cannot be exhausted in a simple definition or classification. Again: if being can only be understood and delimited by means of itself, then, in the same way, truth, as one of its transcendental properties, can only be understood from itself. The essence and scope of truth are as unlimited as being itself, therefore, its field of action cannot be narrowed, on the contrary, its full breadth must be opened to it so that truth penetrates everywhere as that unlimited determination.

Hence, in this work, Balthasar attempts to describe the *essence* of truth by recognizing that it exists as a primordial datum. To reduce the knowledge of truth to a purely theoretical evidence is unacceptable since, with that, it is stripped of its universality and, therefore, of its essence. It ceases to be what it is. And, for this very reason, truth must be inseparably united to goodness and beauty in a perijoretic unity with the unity of being. It is then a matter of "the truth as it meets us first of all in the world, as the truth of things and

of man, a truth that in its ultimate foundation refers back to God, to the Creator"[755] . Hence the following two fundamental affirmations, which express well the objective and method of *Theology* I:

> In the first place: that the world, as it exists concretely, is a world either positively or negatively in relation to the God of grace and supernatural revelation, and that in this relation there are no neutral points or planes. The world, as an object of knowledge, is always inserted in this supernatural sphere, and, in a corresponding way, man's faculty of knowing is always under the positive sign of faith or the negative sign of unbelief . [756]
>
> In the second place, however, it must be pointed out that the inner richness of philosophical truth - leaving aside entirely the theological light that always illumines it - is much richer than most of its expositions make us presume. The ancient principle according to which grace presupposes nature demands precisely, for the sake of the supernatural understanding of grace, a much more comprehensive description and investigation of natural truth than is usually done .[757]

With this we can better understand the structuring criterion of this third part of the *Trilogy*. From an understanding of truth as transcendental of being and, therefore, in correlation with metaphysics, he exposes this transcendental from four access doors (which we have briefly presented in the second chapter and to which we refer) that describe this primordial datum: truth as nature, truth as freedom, truth as mystery and truth as participation. This ontological understanding of truth has the capacity to illuminate the mutual relationship between natural truth and supernatural truth and makes possible, moreover, both a revelation of God through created reality and, at the same time, grants philosophy the possibility of a better and more penetrating understanding of its own philosophical themes, starting from revelation itself. We are here, once again, before that absolutely constitutive principle of all Balthasar's thought: reality is understood in its fullness and authenticity only from God, since everything has been created in the image of the Word. And this gives a new dignity to philosophy - also understood in the strictly philosophical sense - because it helps it to discover and understand better - by methods and in a strictly philosophical field - natural truths that, without the help of revelation, would probably still have remained in the dark.

Other philosophical texts

1. Here we can neither describe nor exhaustively present Balthasar's

abundant philosophical production. But, by way of general information, we can mention some of his most important writings. We have just pointed out the texts within the *Trilogy;* we also referred to three important articles: *Patristics, Scholasticism and Us; The Task of Catholic Philosophy in Our Time; Philosophy, Christianity, Monasticism*[758] ; as well as his works on the thought of the three fathers, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus the Confessor, which also contain abundant philosophical reflections. But there are other works that are equally important.

2. First of all, his aforementioned doctoral thesis, reworked once he finished his theological studies: *Apocalypse of the German Soul. Studies on a Doctrine of the Ultimate Positions*[759] . It is a "Christian interpretation of one hundred and fifty years of German humanism - from the Enlightenment to his time (1930)"[760] , in which he tries - already in those early days of his life- to illuminate the worldly from the Christian, thus achieving an *apocalypse* (= revelation), a clarification of the *soul* of German humanism, that is, of its *being* and its position before the ultimate realities of that whole historical process that, when unfolding and interpreting it as a totality, is better understood. At the end of his life, recalling that first great work, he states:

> German culture from the early Middle Ages to the modern era had been Christian, and from the eighteenth century onwards it moved further and further away from its foundations. So, for me, the question suddenly arose: how is it that the great ones, on whom this new culture rests, are ultimately and most profoundly with respect to the Christian heritage? All of them, from Herder and Lessing, through Kant and the idealists, the Weimarists, Jean Paul and Hölderlin, Hebbel, Wagner, Nietzsche to the philosophers of life, Hofmannsthal, Rilke and Scheler. Prometheus and Dionysus against the crucified, but weren't those two also crucified? That is the question of my first three-volume work: "The Apocalypse of the German Soul", a work that had to be completely rewritten .[761]

Indeed, in three large volumes, totaling 1,612 pages, he devoted himself to answering this methodical question, starting with each of these thinkers, their doctrines and historical events, where, throughout the development, philosophy, theology, literature and art converged. In other words, the aim was to reveal the point of transcendence of each historical moment, which not only reveals its

interiority, but also reveals in what and how much it can be reconciled with the Christian. With this aim, he reads, examines and interprets the most relevant of German humanist thought, confronting the authors with each other and with Christianity. In this way, he first delves into the dialectic of German idealism, in which converge both the long posterity of Plotinus and the romantic creative subjectivity and all the intellectual, vital and emotional forces that, as a whole brought into a system, become "the law of man and the condition of existence of God"[762] . The names of Goethe, Lessing, Kant, Hamann, Herder, Schiller, Schelling, Fichte, Novalis, Hölderling and, obviously, Hegel appear there. All this is represented by the myth of Prometheus. But he also examines that other stance, which emerges as the concrete is reflected upon and questioned more consciously: existentialism. The palpable reality of human expiration and fragmentation, which implies resignation, tragedy and contradiction, also becomes a vital principle of the human being, in terms of worldliness, finitude and, finally, submission. All this becomes both a conscious yes to human life as it is and with all its contradictions, as well as an effort - heroic and tragic at the same time - to transcend oneself. Here the names of Wagner, Nietzsche, Bergson, Klages, George, Spittler, Hoffmannsthal, Dostoyevsky, Kirkegaard, Scheler, Husserl, Rilke and, obviously, Heidegger and Barth appear. This is represented by the myth of Dionysus. Throughout this journey, Balthasar makes explicit the profound anthropocentrism of this development, but which, nevertheless, remains open to a beyond the contingent. Therefore, both Promethean idealism and Dionysian tragedy can find their authentic transcendence toward the divine totality in the unique and historical reality of the kenosis and incarnation of the Word. That is the authentic "myth": the incarnate God .[763]

3. But also, in several texts of a properly theological character, Balthasar made incursions into philosophical themes. First of all, in the book *Karl Barth. Presentation and Interpretation of his Theology*[764] , based on the dialogue he conducts with Barth about the possibility of an *analogia entis, he* takes up the argument of the indissoluble interpenetration between philosophy and theology. The previous

dialogue/dispute between Barth and Przywara on this subject was well known, which had failed to reach a certain harmony by keeping the *analogia entis* in a relationship of opposition with the *analogia fidei*. Hence Balthasar's interest -in this study-, along with exposing in a clear, objective and truthful way Barth's thought, to also show its limitations and its dependence on German idealism. In this context, Balthasar makes a great effort to explain the Catholic sense of the relationship between nature and grace, resorting to his well-known philosophical instruments, particularly St. Thomas. And he devotes long pages not only to the theme of analogy, but also to that of nature, history, grace and, evidently, to a better elucidation of the relationship between God and the creature. Let us also recall that, at the end of the Second Vatican Council, for the collection *Mysterium salutis,* Balthasar contributed a brief text, entitled *The Way of Access to the Reality of God*[765] , in which he develops a kind of fundamental theodicy, exposing four ways of access to the reality of God: (1) from the already known foundational human experience of the child and his mother; (2) from the history of religions as a whole; (3) from reflection on the natural and supernatural knowledge of God, as expounded at the First Vatican Council; and (4) from the factual fact that there are varied religions in the world. As can be seen, it is a theodicy founded on the phenomenology of religions. Here we could add another book, which we have already mentioned, that reflects on the possibilities and conditions of a theology of history: *The Whole in the Fragment. Aspects of the theology of history*[766] , which is a new and renewed version of some previous works. This book has an important philosophical substratum in its reflection on time -based on Augustine-, but also in its dialogue with contemporary philosophy on the real possibilities that human beings have to develop and reach their fullness as such. It is also a philosophy of history. And we cannot forget the well-known text *Only love is worthy of faith*[767] , where Balthasar exposes "in schematic form" the method that he will later use in the development of *In the Space of Metaphysics* (*Glory* IV and V), that is, that the nucleus of revelation is only visible to those who selflessly give themselves to the love of God -which coincides with his

honor and glory- and "everything else, what still can and has to be said about the world and man, all 'finality' and 'evolution' of the individual, of society and of the entire universe on all levels - from the vital to the religious - must be ordered and subordinated to this first concept, in order to be able to understand it *in the end* as full of meaning"[768] .

4. After all that has been said, it is quite understandable that, at the end of his life, when he was invited to participate in a colloquium on *Philosophy and Theology* in Namur (France), Balthasar wrote a text - suggestively- entitled: *Recovering a Philosophy from Theology*[769] . There, after a historical review and the challenges that exist today (it is the 1980s) for a possible Christian philosophy, starting from the Thomistic paradox about man in his relationship between nature and grace, he shows how philosophy can be recovered from theology. In effect, he formulates two principles: 1º "The world has been created in Christ, [and] in this way man has been created in view of the supernatural filiation of God". 2º "The Creator has incontestably placed the essence of the creature as a structured reality in itself"[770] . And since from these two principles it is fulfilled that grace elevates and perfects nature, then, if these same two principles are now applied to philosophy, it will mean that "in the elevation of the thinking man (philosophizing) is also contained a liberation of his thinking for philosophy." "The *donum* [= gift] of grace enriches and liberates the *datum* [= the given] (nature), so that the latter is empowered for a clairvoyant thought which, in the domain of created nature, of the world in general and of the world in its particulars, discovers laws which, although they are purely natural, are nevertheless entirely closed to thought not inhabited by grace"[771] .

With this we close the account of Balthasar's central philosophical works. And we have been able to verify that, from the *Apocalypse of the German Soul* to this last article, Balthasar has maintained intact that basic principle that he has summarized with extreme clarity in this last quotation that we have offered.

Some of the most relevant authors

We know that Balthasar elaborates his theology/philosophy by accepting and assuming that truth found in the entire history of Western thought, transforming it into a true methodological criterion of his work. Thus, in the first chapter, we mentioned multiple influences that are perceptible in the *Trilogy*. However, from the philosophical point of view, there are some authors who deserve special consideration, either because of the extent of their influence or because of their constant presence -as *vis à vis*- throughout the work. Among them, four names are indispensable: Plotinus, Hegel, Thomas and Heidegger. Plotinus and Hegel are important for understanding his all-encompassing view of totality and his understanding of the dynamism of history. Thomas and Heidegger, on the other hand, are important for his doctrine of being. All four have been presented in *the space of metaphysics,* so that there we can discover the doctrinal elements that are most relevant to Balthasar. We can also add Kierkegaard and Nietzsche who, although he does not deal with them explicitly in the *Trilogy,* are very present with their ideas - like so many others - throughout his work.

All-encompassing totality

1. *Plotinus.* Balthasar spares no praise for him, both as the culmination of the ancient world, and for his tremendous influence in the following, up to the present. After Virgil, he is "the second in spiritually concluding the ancient world and offering it to the new". He "tries to integrate the philosophical knowledge of the ancients. He does philosophy and even more than that, for in it he brings together all the values of myth and religion [...] in a passionate return to the origins, where everything is still mixed"[772] . This means -for Balthasar-, according to what he has already stated about the development of the ancient world, that, for Plotinus, both in myth -which is revelation of God- and in philosophy -which is human thought-, the very being that "is the divine is discovered, and its total revelation is so overwhelmingly glorious to him, that it far surpasses all the glory of the particular myths"[773] . On the other hand, he is a true founder, whose posterity is impressive. Let us quote here - at some length - the words of Balthasar, when he lists all the authors who follow him:

> Of his influence in Europe - not to mention Arabic - we have already said briefly that through him the whole heritage of Antiquity is transmitted in a normative form to the Fathers of the Church of the most powerful thought (St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Augustine, St. Maximus, Dionysius), who rival him in the total theological interpretation of being. Tinged with his color, it receives its concept of philosophy also the Scholasticism from Boethius and Scotus Eriugena to St. Albert the Great, St. Bonaventure, St. Thomas, Eckhart, Dante, Nicholas of Cusa, Gerson, Ficino. The humanists return to him when they want to draw from the scholastic dust the fresh vision of the sacred and wholesome totality. After the stoicism of the Baroque and the Enlightenment, the enthusiasts of the Universe and its glory also turn to him: Bruno, Shaftesbury and Herder. In him Hegel recognizes one of his precursors .[774]

That is to say, his philosophy-theology remains present and bearing fruit from the Fathers of the Church to Hegel. Now, a thought as complex and profound as the one has Plotinus, is always susceptible to diverse interpretations. Balthasar is aware of this, and not only in this author, but in several others such as Thomas or Plato himself. Plotinus' doctrine allowed a perfect Christian utilization, but the long idealist posterity was also possible, from Eckhart onwards. Indeed,

> in relation to Hegel, Plotinus is now often interpreted in the hope of speculatively justifying the former's system. But this is only one of the two interpretative possibilities before which the work of Plotinus is confronted, with an urgency of decision like no other work in the course of time. Christians understood and used this work as a theological philosophy. Modern non-Christians interpret it, apparently with the same right, in the sense of an idealistic thought of identity .[775]

Balthasar highlights three great aspects of this successful ancient synthesis, which incorporates philosophy, religion, myth and poetry of the ancient world -if the other three can be so clearly distinguished from religion- in a system that is still "uncontaminated by Christianity and totally absorbed by its own vision"[776] . Three characteristics that will also have a determining influence in the following centuries.

First, his concept or understanding of the *One* or God, who is both *in* all and *above* all. For Plotinus, since being is the divine and its revelation in all things is glorious and moving, this lordship and sovereignty of the absolute allows us to understand its "'appearance' in the realm of the world as the epiphany" of both "its own inner necessity (rationality)" and its absolute freedom or "lack of necessity," where "both mean the same thing"[777] . And this absolute lordship is "the ultimate essence of beauty". With this concept of being and beauty, Plotinus has been able to define God - in terms of his ultimate

characteristic - wonderfully and accurately, but unfortunately, it has not always been sufficiently taken into account when thinking about God:

> As One, he is so regally lordly that he is Unique without rival to oppose him, and he is so totally distinct that (as Nicholas of Cusa will also say, following Plotinus) he is the *Non-aliud*, the "not other". And for the same reason, the One is not separated from anything: God, *being* absolutely transcendent, is absolutely immanent to all things . [778]

With this, Plotinus not only rejects that God conceived as "distant" and superior to all things -an "immobile motor" of all things (Aristotle)-, but also all Stoic pantheism, which makes of God a kind of sum of all that exists. Indeed, God really is beyond all created things, because he is not something created; but, at the same time, he is in all created things because he is immanent to all of them, precisely because he is not one more thing among all created things. God is beyond all that is thinkable and, precisely because of this, he can be together with and within everything, without being anything of that everything. This is the incomprehensible mystery of God that qualifies him precisely as *God, that* is, as uncreated, not something else, however great and sublime that "thing" may be thought of.

The second characteristic of Plotinus is "his doctrine of the mind or spirit (*nous*)"[779] . However, this doctrine can be appreciated in all its importance only if a non-idealistic interpretation is made. For Balthasar, "the dual unity between thought and being" is "the tight compendium of the philosophical tradition." "It is a matter of an objective idealism or idealistic realism, which founds all being in its logical character (intelligibility), in the archetypal intellect that primarily thought it"[780] . In this way "being, insofar as it confronts thought, is always form" and, in this sense, it is beautiful, precisely because it is a form; and, at the same time, it is a beautiful form because it has encountered the spirit or mind. But, at the same time, "the One is beyond being, spirit, form and beauty as the source of it all"[781] . And, therefore, it is not necessary - as idealism does - to degrade "the One to the function of the *nous,* to a moment of it." On the contrary, it is necessary to maintain that difference of levels, which is properly "theological," "between the spirit and the One" because there is "a revelation that arises from the center and depth of

being itself." That is the glory of being that bursts forth, or rather, "the 'glory' that from above being penetrates being-(spirit) and bestows upon it its absolute and transcendental beauty." And "precisely the elevation above being [is what gives] to this radiance a character more than philosophical, properly theological, [but] which is entirely lost in the modern idealist interpretation"[782] . To the extent that Plotinus is interpreted "non-ideally", this second characteristic of his thought appears in all its magnitude.

Finally, the third characteristic is a consequence of what has just been said: it is the theological structure of the beautiful. For Plotinus it is clear that the miracle and wonder of being surpasses all reason, "but it is not possible for the emanated to exist without the Origin, which, however unattainable and unrecognizable it may be, is the Necessary One." "The One remains in itself and enters into no other, but all other things depend on it (Plato)"[783] . In that sense the One is "over-beauty" or "excess of beauty" :[784]

> This uncovers the ultimate structure of the beautiful: its peculiarity is in the domain of the *nous,* which is the realm of form, of the mutual transparency of subject and object, of difference and identity. But it has this peculiarity only as an epiphany of the mystery of being itself, and therefore, as a sign and claim of this mystery: it is reality that radiates (horizontally), but the radiance that makes the radiated shine comes (vertically) from above. From this structure we started at the beginning of the first volume: *form* and *splendor*. Both are sectioned by Plotinus in a sort of anatomy of beauty, but in such a way that beauty cannot exist or understand itself without the Super-beauty -which we will call here "glory"-. The *fascinosum* that radiates beauty on all levels of the spirit, of the soul, of nature, refers to beauty itself but refers *in* it to something that is *above* it: the structure of the beautiful is inscribed in the formal structure of theology .[785]

In synthesis, Plotinus' refined concept of God has allowed him to elaborate a metaphysics of being of such depth that he succeeds in making God present in the world without losing any of his total transcendence; and he is capable, at the same time, of structuring an aesthetics that is truly theological. Here, philosophy and theology form an inseparable unity. It is not for nothing that Balthasar places Plotinus in the section he entitles "religion"[786] .

However, Balthasar is not unaware of the limits and dangers that this philosophy can entail. Indeed, in these same pages he is aware that the question of God's freedom in creation must be raised here[787] . And

he also wonders to what extent, in Plotinus himself, there was indeed a philosophy of identity that has allowed the later development that led to what Balthasar has called "the European decision"[788] .

2. Hegel. In the section of the *Metaphysics of the Spirit,* within the *Autoglorification of the Spirit,* together with Schiller, Fichte and Schelling, Balthasar highlights Hegel in a special way. His philosophy is the culmination of modernity and, although he devotes important pages to him *In the Space of Metaphysics,* his presence is equally recurrent in the rest of Balthasar's work. In Henrici's words, "from his first work to his last, Balthasar develops his thought in a face to face with Hegel. The verdict is clearer than in the case of Plotinus, because in the case of Hegel, in post-Christian times, there is no longer any opening in waiting, but the Christian element is clearly assumed in the philosophical one"[789] . Indeed, Hegel transforms the Christian πίστις into definitive γνῶσις which, for him, becomes the synthesis of the whole "religious past of the world" and an open path for the future[790] . "Instead of remaining frozen, along with Fichte and with Schelling, at the point of identity, the 'one' is diluted in the 'all' and there manifests itself as 'fullness of love' (πλήρωμα) and as indigent poverty (πενία, κένωσις) at the same time, and then returns victoriously, with all its truth and magnificence unfolded, to the one one one"[791] . The similarities with Plotinus are evident, but here, in post-Christian times, "the specifically Christian is reduced to the moment of the omnipresent kenosis of being in which [...] the unsurpassable 'glory' of reality is realized." It is the culmination of the interpretation of the world "as an explanation of God". This way of thinking can be understood as follows:

> Every finite entity is the *aliud* of another, and needs, in order to be itself, this other, for it passes, when it is thought, to the other and, when it thinks itself, it seeks itself (and at the same time the other). This movement dominates and penetrates the universality of finitude and only calms down when the last possible other becomes integrated into the absolute which can no longer have any opposition because it includes them all in itself. The *pan* [= all] itself as the fullness of integration can no longer be in opposition with respect to the "one" as its other: the *kai* [= and] indicates precisely its identity. But insofar as the movement, which always resumes the one with its other in an all-embracing unity, is truth and knowledge, all true knowledge must necessarily be rooted in the *non-aliud,* that is, in absolute knowing: leaving here and returning there. The *non-aliud* says, as negation, that all

aliud must be placed in the absolute, in order to integrate it (annul it): position and annulment are one and the same process .[792]

For Balthasar, Hegel arrives at this result starting from the biblical revelation, but eliminating in it the biblical glory and identifying the divine-human spirit with the absolute. In effect, Hegel unifies Greek and biblical thought. He starts from the fact that God, as God, cannot be thought "objectively," since he is light, love and life; and, on the other hand, from the great Greek tradition, he understands finitude as the division of the real and synthesis as the real and true. If this is now elevated to the absolute then creation is a self-deployment of God as love and its withdrawal is an act of integration into the whole. Now this reconciliation between the Greek and the biblical results in the total elimination of the sovereign and dominating presence of the Old Testament God *over* the world, a God who called and made covenant, who exhorted, saved and reproved as the distinctive form of his glory (*kabod*)[793] . But this also destroys the New Testament as a particular experience of Jesus. For Christology is now transformed into a "conclusive universal formula of the God-world relationship"[794] . Thus, finally, religion is transformed into "knowledge of the spirit about itself as spirit; Christianly speaking: as the identity of the Holy Spirit in God and in redeemed man, of that Spirit that 'searches the abysses of divinity' and that 'we have'"[795] . Thus we pass from faith to knowledge and philosophy. Before, the glory of God meant that God was both *above* that manifestation and *in* that very manifestation; that God appeared *in* the world, but also *above* that very appearance. Now, on the other hand, this *envelope* has been lowered completely to the mere *en* of the manifestation itself[796] . And, moreover, where the divine has come to be identified with the universal, the particular is necessarily eliminated because it becomes irrelevant, with all the consequences that this has had for the history of the world .[797]

As can be seen, Hegel's interpretation differs quite a bit from other approaches to this same Plotinian heritage, such as, for example, that of the Fathers of the Church. But both approaches are possible (therein lies the European decision, which is of such interest to Balthasar). However, whatever is decided has important consequences. At stake here is nothing less than the *dialogical*

structure of God and (consequently) of the human being. This is the central point of Balthasar's entire confrontation with Hegel and with the whole of German idealism as a system of identity. It is certainly a question of the theme of God, but the theme of God is, at the same time, the theme of man, his image. Indeed, the core of all anthropology is whether there exists that Thou -with a capital letter- that not only gives the ultimate and immovable foundation to human existence, but also allows the human being to be recognized as "someone", whom an Absolute Thou sustains and loves him definitively. But when "identity" is reached, it is no longer possible to *dialogue* with God and, therefore, neither is prayer possible. The Absolute Thou is eliminated. Here-at bottom-we are in the field of theology, but also in the field of philosophy. Because what is at stake is whether there is a "dialogicity" in God and in the human being that allows us to love and recognize God as love[798] . We will return to this topic in a moment, but here it was important to establish what was the real reason for this permanent confrontation with German idealism and why Balthasar devotes so many pages to the "metaphysics of the spirit" *in the space of metaphysics.* There, not only the "European decision" is at stake, but more deeply, the personal decision of each human being in the face of God and the recognition of who the human being authentically is.

Doctrine of being

Thomas Aquinas. Although *In the Space of Metaphysics* does not devote too many pages to him, his teaching is absolutely decisive for Balthasar's philosophy and theology. In fact, the structure of the *Trilogy*, based on the transcendentals of being, is sustained by Thomas's doctrine of being, in particular, by the "real distinction". Balthasar culminates the treatment of *The Theological* A Priori *of the Philosophy of Beauty,* in *Gloria* IV, by expounding four aspects of Thomas's philosophy, which undergird his own theology-philosophy.

In the first place, he presents the foundation of the doctrine of being in Thomas and his most specific contribution. Aquinas makes a synthesis by gathering all the material inherited from the great Greek and Christian philosophical-theological tradition, and precisely in this

synthesis is his most original contribution: "his affirmation of *esse* and its relations with the essences". He conceives "*esse* as the non-subsistent fullness and perfection of all reality and as the ultimate 'likeness of the divine goodness'", whereby "God can never again be designated as the being of things, except as their efficient, exemplary and final cause"[799] . God is sharply distinguished from what the world is. God is not the world. He is "'the wholly other' in all its truth and seriousness"[800] . Of God we know that he exists, but we cannot know what he is. Thus, "the Thomistic doctrine of the distinction between *esse* and *essentia* is a philosophical formula; but it allows for the first time to clearly separate the 'glory' of God from cosmic beauty," even allowing the believer and the theologian to recover the concept of glory[801] . This is, therefore, a true culminating moment in the history of philosophy.

Secondly, Balthasar shows how "St. Thomas works with the material placed at his disposal by tradition"[802] , some of whose summits are Dionysius, Augustine and Aristotle. From these three authors he elaborates his concept of beauty. God being the cause of everything, then he is also the cause of all beauty, because God himself gives each thing its consonance and clarity, that is, he gives them their proportion, harmony and splendorous light. But beauty is also something objective. Thus, from St. Augustine he gathers this other idea: "a thing is not beautiful because it is wanted, [but] it is wanted because it is beautiful". And he concludes, taking ideas from various other authors, by affirming that the Son of God is "beautiful" because he is the perfect image and Word of the Father and, for this very reason, possesses a clarity "that enlightens everything and in which everything is reflected"[803] . The beautiful God plans and creates a beautiful world.

With this concept of "being" he can now develop his third theme: being as the likeness of God. This is the moment in which he exposes his understanding of "the real distinction" in St. Thomas. For Balthasar, "the doctrine of the *actus essendi*" [= act of existing] is the "first, immediate and universal action of God in the world." And he explains this in a truly important passage - which he will recall

successively throughout *the Trilogy* - because it underlies his entire theological aesthetics:

> The process of being-Thomas also often speaks of its emanation from God-is the very process of reality [...], while ἐνέργεια, *actus,* actual or effective being is a fullness which no particular being can exhaust, a comprehensiveness which no concept can encompass, and to which every being and every concept must conform. Far from extrinsically supervening on a complete essence, thought of as possible (which can be or not be), the possibility of all that is possible lies in reality: in that a being can be introduced into the encompassing fullness of actual being and admit it into its communion. Thus, *esse* is at once *communissimum* [= the most common] -that in which all things commune as in the most perfect thing that in all things can be conceived- *et intimum quod profundius omnibus inest* [= and intimate of all things and that which penetrates them most deeply], for it founds, as has been said, the most intimate unity of each singular and particular being. It is the encompassing thing, always inexhaustible by the number of natures and always participable in infinite ways, but always and only also being that which from the bottom interweaves the natures: it only realizes the natures by realizing itself in them. It has no subsistence in itself but is inherent in the natures: *esse non est subsistens sed inhaerens* [= being is not subsistent but inherent] [...] In the infinitude of the possible, which can participate in the act of being, only the divine intellect is capable of "inventing" and bringing (into existence) the designed forms, but not by adding them as something external to the act, but in such a way that the act stamps them, so to speak, by virtue of its fullness (also always unlimited) .[804]

Two affirmations are fundamental: (1) That God is the *cause* of the being of all things, that is, he is the foundation of all that is real and, although he is present *in* all that is real, he is not for that reason "part" of what is created. It is precisely the *Non-Aliud.* And (2) the distinction between God and being, which is precisely what allows God to be in each of the creatures, not being a creature. God is the closest and most intimate thing that each being possesses, without being "a fragment" of each of the beings. All this, on the one hand, gives God an extreme depth and intimacy in the creature and, on the other hand, gives an immense dignity and individuality to the creature itself; since, both the created reality is not conceived as a fall or degradation of God -a sort of depowered god-, and neither is the creature something negative -as anti-God- because it is founded in God -as his image-; and, therefore, it has a positive character because it has arisen from the freedom of God and not from a necessary emanation. All this is based on the *distinction* between God and *esse.* "With a distinction that can be called 'real' (with caution, because it is an inexplicable mystery), God contemplates his creature with a free gaze [...]:

precisely when the creature feels himself apart from God in being, he knows himself to be thought of in the most immediate way by God's love, and precisely when the limitation of his being shows him his total difference from God, he knows himself redundantly gifted with participation in the real and effective being (*Wirklich-Sein*) of God"[805] . Thus, *being* - the fact that something exists - is the fullest and noblest thing that anyone has and is the first effect of God's acting; but, at the same time, it is something empty because it cannot be said to be given an existing, as such, but is always the existing of *something* concrete.

This unfathomable mystery of the act of being, which allows us to understand both the greatness of God and the dignity of the creature without either losing its own reality, is what allows Balthasar to elaborate a true theological aesthetic because it is what grants the created being its capacity to radiate the divine glory and, therefore, to welcome revelation. But Balthasar regrets that the posterity of St. Thomas has not been "able to bear this oscillation"[806] in the mystery of being, which fluctuates at an incomparable midpoint between fullness and emptiness; and therefore, the mystery of being has been reduced either to a supreme concept understood as mere existence, or to identifying that being - in itself - with God, who generates by himself the finite essences. In the first case, a mere existence is stripped of its transcendental fullness and is made to fall into a positive science, and that is the end of philosophy; and the second position falls into pantheistic idealism, which -by a roundabout way- is also the end of philosophy, since the human being ends up being "greater than what he thinks in his philosophy. In both cases it turns out that man is the only question mark left behind reality, the only 'glory' worthy of being questioned"[807] .

Finally, the fourth theme is metaphysics as aesthetics. We have said that the "real distinction" means that the *esse* is above the *essentia* but, at the same time, in the *essentia.* Therefore, the entire "sphere of essences is synthesized each time in an over-essential element that transcends them" and that, therefore, only in it can they be thought: *being.* Now, "the mystery of the relation between *esse* and *essentia*," insofar as it "grounds, makes trustworthy and confirms the beauty of

all relations of essence," can be understood "as the 'proportion' that grounds all the beauty of the world: and this proportion is immediately transparent to the original, free and creative background that is God and from which the beauty of the world mysteriously derives"[808] . Thus conceived, this mysterious reality allows two very important things: (1) to understand beauty as order, proportion, proportionality in the essences and with the Creator, since the creature is essentially proportion between being and essence; and (2) since every relationship between the essences is affirmed in its beauty, starting from the relationship with being, that ineffable proportion - in the background of creation and beyond it - indicates the Creator God, from whom all the beauty of the world derives. Thus, the order of the world is definitively affirmed upon God, who is both immanent and transcendent to the world. That is why beauty is a transcendental of being. And as such, it can only be recognized by the spirit, that is, by the human being. But it is founded on an inscrutable prior grace: every creature realizes its own being according to the prior will of God and, therefore, its own merit is also a gift of God. With this it is clear why Balthasar regards Thomas as the culmination of the *theological a priori of the philosophy of beauty.* He has emphasized in the best way that the *pulchrum,* like everything transcendental, is indefinable and that it is simply an "unavoidable *primum*" that only a spirit can *experience* .[809]

2. *Heidegger.* With him Balthasar closes the period of *ancient mediation,* which is the post-medieval attempt to return to the pre-Christian world. There Balthasar gives an account of the last centuries -from the XV to the XX century-, which tried to invoke again the religious pagan Antiquity, putting it next to a theological speculation, but starting from an already rationalized revelation. Heidegger -the last of these attempts- seeks to overcome both Christianity and the current technical world, thus attempting a more radical return to classical antiquity. The importance of this author lies in his desire to develop a metaphysics that *recovers* being from its long oblivion and, although in important points he differs from Balthasar, both have a great coincidence in their concern for *being itself.* Balthasar presents

this philosopher from three main aspects: his return to the Greek origin of the concept of being; the authentic meaning of the mystery of being; and the fundamental difference with his own thought.

Regarding the former, Heidegger affirms that in pagan antiquity "what was, "in reality, the pre-Platonic φύσις, which [came] to be simply the all-encompassing being, was erroneously called 'nature'"[810] . This idea, which enveloped his whole thought, makes him propose a renewed history of metaphysics, which can respond - this time well - to what "being" means. It is known his affirmation about the abandonment of this concept and, therefore, that it was necessary to rethink it in depth. So, for Heidegger, "the elementary experience of the mystery of reality is expressed in the Greek 'wonder' (θαυμάζειν) at the form of things that exist, at their order and their radiant beauty"[811] . Thus, at the basis of everything is the question of why a thing exists, as opposed to not existing. But, unlike St. Thomas, here "this being that emerges is not conceived within the scholastic-Thomistic distinction between essence and existence (against which Heidegger takes a stand), if by essence is meant here (in the Greek way) something intelligible in itself, to which existence can access or not according to (God's) arbitrary will." "For him φύσις means the being that emerges from the primordial or abyssal background in its appearance, prior to any subjectivity." It is therefore this emersion that gives all its ontological dignity to emergence; and, moreover, it "remits time and history," which had hitherto been rooted in existence, "to being itself, a being that diffuses itself 'cosmically' as world."[812] . With all this it can be easily appreciated that Heidegger is indebted to Thomas, both in the transcendence of being, and in the fundamental difference between being and entity (or existent), although, they differ in the interpretation of this difference. "For both of them the act of being that embraces every entity is the illuminating element and, therefore, the place of origin of truth"[813] .

Balthasar then expounds the Heideggerian understanding of the fundamental mystery of being: "Heidegger renounces metaphysics and ontology, in the traditional sense of the term, in order to be able to penetrate beyond them to the 'memory of being itself'. And, above all,

he tries to make the Greek *usia* of being obvious, as *par-usia*", as presence, as affirmation of being against nothingness[814] . Thus then, "only through the pre-sence and in-essence of being is something given that is called being or essence [...]. Thus, *usia* is only intelligible in the presence of being (*par-usia*), which, however, as open space, is always also an au-sence, non-essence and remoteness." We see here that, in a way, Heidegger applies to being the attributes proper to a negative theology of God. That is why he can then conclude with his characteristic doctrine of being: since being, "in its difference with respect to the entity (essence)" is "the non-essential," then being is not a constitutive existent element of the entity, but is the non-being, something completely other with respect to every entity. Being is not there, but is given, it is every existing thing. The existent, in short, is a word that indicates being[815] . Finally, all this will bring, in addition, an important consequence in the interpretation of the human being as being-there: this is "that 'essence' that can 'let be' the being what it is", as a withdrawal from "in front of what exists in order for it to reveal itself in what it is and in the way it is". And that withdrawing, insofar as it makes possible the "non-concealment that is proper to truth (ἀ-λήθεια)" is human "freedom." Freedom, as availability, is to let be .[816]

Having exposed the core of Heidegger's thought with respect to the mystery of being, Balthasar now indicates -thirdly- his fundamental difference with him: Heidegger fails in "the interpretation of the ontological difference between entity and being". For this reason, this third part of the section on Heidegger, he entitled *Loss of the gain.* Because what had been gained by recognizing that difference that manifests itself, both in the objective illumination of being in entities and in the spaces of subjective freedom of human existence, is lost by not recognizing that *other* difference, which is determinant in Thomas and which is deduced from the first one: the difference that emerges between being and absolute Being. Indeed, it is the fact that "the *actus essendi* as non-subsistent fullness that comes to subsist and comes to itself from and in the finite essentialities, and the *essentiae* that come to reality by this act, without the infinite act of being having to impinge and divide itself"[817] ; that both things (*actus essendi* and

essentiae) refer, in short, "to an absolute subsistent being, God, who makes each of the essences partakers of the fullness of his being [...] and creates them from his own being [...] and creates them from his own being [...] and creates them from his own being [...] and creates them from his own being [...].[...] and creates them out of their absolute power and freedom [...] as recipients capable of this participation in being"[818] . That is what Heidegger does not understand in the same way:

> He thinks of the supraconceptual *actus essendi,* which becomes temporal in each of the essences, endowing it with the distinctives of the subsistent (divine) act. And since the former must be essentially traversed by nothingness in order to be temporalized, this negativity, which makes subjective-objective illumination possible, becomes an attribute of absolute being. In other words: *Heidegger identifies the negations of ancient Christian theology (as "negative theology") with the nothingness of the act of being constitutive of the world.* The consequence is, once again, that God (as in Eriugena, Eckhart and the Cusano) has need of the world if he wants to explain its implications and that, therefore, through difference there is not an *analogia entis,* but an *identitas,* which both temporalizes and includes difference . [819]

The consequence of all this -in Balthasar's eyes- is that in Heidegger there will no longer be an *admiration* for the fact that things exist instead of not existing, since existing things cannot return to an absolute freedom -by not recognizing their existence-. Indeed, since Heidegger does not think difference in the Thomistic-Christian way, that is, he does not see it as a sign of the creatureliness of all things, then unfortunately "from difference he returns to identity"[820] . Now, this fundamental critique does not prevent Balthasar from valuing highly all of Heidegger's contributions regarding the "return to being" and a possible theological aesthetics. Therefore, one cannot deny many similarities between Balthasar's philosophy and that of Heidegger, that is to say, the influence that the latter had on our author.

3. Kierkegaard and *Nietzsche.* Although Balthasar does not deal with them explicitly *in the Space of Metaphysics*, their thought is nevertheless very present and they have also had an important influence on him. P. Henrici states that in *Apocalypse of the German Soul*[821] they are "the leitmotiv for the second and third volume" of that work[822] . And Balthasar himself mentions them at various points in his

autobiographical writings. In 1965, referring to the possibility of an "anonymous Christian", he recalls the influence he received from Kierkegaard concerning the necessity of an explicit confession of Christ:

> To my misfortune [in the face of the dissolution of doctrinal differences], at the time when my youth fell into the wave of Kierkegaard (Guardini explained it to us in Berlin), I had read in Kierkegaard that the apostle of Christ is the one who allows himself to be killed for Christ. And who today does not claim for himself the title of apostle? For the Dane Paul also figures, for he bears in his body the wounds of the historical Jesus and wants to live and die only for the One who loved him and gave himself for him. If that is our model, then there are no anonymous Christians without more, as opposed to so many people - hopefully all of them - who achieve salvation through the grace of Christ. But grace for all depends on the way of life of him, who embodied the grace of God through the humiliation of his poverty, his obedience and his bodily castration and [...] who always wanted to have participants in his way of life .[823]

That early Kierkergaardian fascination can be seen reflected - being already in the context of the post-conciliar years -, for example, in a couple of texts that indeed express that kind of rather radical convictions: *Who is a Christian?*[824] and *Seriousness with things. Cordula or the authentic case*[825] . For his part, in 1955, alluding now to what was exposed on Nietzsche in his doctoral thesis, he recalls the importance of the methodical "dialogicality" of that author. He recognizes it as a contribution to his own theological method, which we can clearly perceive in Balthasar's style, that is, in the dialogical element that structures the *Trilogy*:

> Nietzsche, in his incessant hidden dialogue with Kierkegaard and Dostoyesky, revealed to me the significance of the dialogical relationship between worldviews, especially between the Christian and the non-Christian .[826]

Indeed, according to Henrici, "the dialogical element as a global and decisive category thus becomes the formal principle of the *Trilogy* [...] this is the background of the European decision and we understand why this decision in the *Theology* can be synthesized once again in the face to face between dialectic and dialogic"[827] . The reference to these two authors is another example of how Balthasar recognizes that he is indebted to a whole philosophical tradition that preceded him.

Two core issues

Reviewing the most relevant authors for Balthasar, some of his most central themes also appeared. Bearing all of them in mind, we will end by presenting two more aspects of his philosophy -which are nuclear- and which are the result of a very successful personal elaboration based on what has already been said, above all, as a consequence of the doctrine of being, in Thomas. They are "the fourfold difference", from the real distinction -dealt with as a conclusion of *In the Space of Metaphysics*-, and the "polar" condition of the transcendentals of being in created being -dealt with in a particular way in the *Epilogue*-. They are a Balthasarian interpretation of Thomas, but also with the influence of two contemporary philosophers, friends of Balthasar: Gustav Siewerth and Ferdinand Ulrich.

The miracle of being and the quadruple difference

On pp. 577-603 of *Gloria* V, Balthasar concludes his entire reflection on aesthetics *In the space of metaphysics.* There he draws the conclusion of his whole journey[828] . The following are the fundamental ideas of these pages.

"The meaning of the intricate historical paths of Western metaphysics is straightforward and simple" if it is ordered around the basic question that is at the heart of metaphysics itself: why does something exist rather than nothing exist. If this question, in the light of the beauty and order found in reality, is answered by attributing to this reality a value of necessity, "then being is identified with its necessity of being"[829] . But in this case there would no longer be room left to admire the existence of reality, at most, to admire the fact that it is beautiful, although always within the space of the necessity of being. Then, on the one hand, beauty would only be understood as simple order and, on the other hand, although the totality of beauty could be called "glory", nevertheless, this "glory" would be no more than the totality of the beauty or order of the *world.* In that understanding, the concept of beauty would have been stripped of its transcendental quality and glory would be only a limit concept. Now, that answer does not do true justice to the phenomenon and miracle of being, since "wonder about being is not only a point of departure, but [...] a permanent element (ἀρχή) of thought." Therefore, "the fundamental

theme of metaphysics should be to constantly rethink this radical miracle"[830] . Well, that has been precisely Balthasar's attempt in these two volumes: to approach the *miracle* of being. And, at the conclusion of his journey, he approaches this miracle again, in four phases, which show four differences, which are the ones that - in the end - reveal "what it is that truly deserves the name 'glory' in metaphysics"[831] .

1. It is completely beyond any intramundane explanation that one exists in this place and at this time. It is equally inexplicable that anyone should begin to exist. Nothing in the world suggests that anyone "must" exist. That experience-absolutely universal-is, moreover, what is implicit in the infant, who emerges into self-consciousness at exactly the same act and moment in which he encounters a welcoming you: his mother[832] . This mystery of one's own existence together with that of another who embraces him, in spite of the fact that later he grows up and this experience becomes more complex, is a basic experience that accompanies each person throughout life and allows him to live and develop. To exist is something as obvious as it is admirable[833] . One cannot explain oneself simply as being part of a cosmic totality, but neither can one attribute to oneself a "necessary" existence in this world, but one can only open oneself to the admirable fact of *existence* and the luminous clarity of *being.* The first difference is then between I and being. I am not being because I might not exist.

2. "As an entity existing among others, I now understand, as a spirit, that all other entities stand in a relation to being identical to mine. From this it follows evidently that all entities certainly participate in being, but that they do not exhaust it"[834] , even if they are infinite entities. That is "the unsurpassable fullness of being as *id quo maius cogitari non potest* [= that beyond which nothing greater can be thought]"[835] . Therefore, the nothingness that runs through every being, even its totality and as totality, makes the being less than being. But being also has its own nothingness due to its inescapable indifference with respect to entities. From all this it follows that it is not the act of existing, as such, that to which the coming into existence of essences is due. And, therefore, I cannot calm my original

astonishment simply by looking at being, of which entities participate, but rather my astonishment must turn to the ontological difference between being and entity. That is the second difference.

Precisely by virtue of this dependence [...] of being on its explanation in being [...], it is impossible to attribute to being the responsibility for the various essential forms of beings in the world. The total indifference that characterizes the being of the entity radically excludes in being itself any planning to sustain itself in subsistence through a certain ascending gradation of essential forms"[836] . This means that the "planes" of things-that is, what those things are, their proper characteristics-are in the essences and not in the act of being. Being is completely indifferent to whatever the essence is. Therefore, it cannot be said that it is merely being that is expressed in entities, because in the entity there is expressed still something more of the fullness of reality, which is not in the simple fact of being, but is in the fact of being "something determined." The relation between essence and being, between entity and act of being, is not then of simple "mutual deducibility," as if one were simply expressed in the other. Hence "the priority of being with respect to existence does not mean" that being must also be held responsible for "the *forms* of essences"[837] . Indeed, these do not come from being and are not in being which, in that sense, is tremendously poor. So, just as being does not have the entities within itself, but simply lets each one be as it is, so too all entities must let being be, so that its light can be and radiate in each of the entities. And, faced with all this, we have only two possibilities: either the greatness - and mystery - of being seems strange to us and we think of nothingness as the basis of everything; or in this same letting being be, this "being can also appear to us in its glory", and with respect to which beauty is nothing more than its echo[838] . Both possibilities have been given throughout the history of Western metaphysics. The third difference is between being and the forms of being or essences.

4. The three differences mentioned above show us that we find ourselves in a world where neither each of us, nor anything else, is a *necessary* integral part. Therefore, "the difference between being and

entity [...] imperatively refers us beyond itself to the last and fourth difference". It is "the difference between God and the world, where God is the only sufficient foundation both for being and for the entity in its concrete form". Indeed, if we have begun our reflection from the awareness that we are not necessary, "the consequence is that the foundation in God of this being not reducible to any necessity refers us to an *ultimate freedom,* which could belong neither to being (insofar as it is non-subsistent), nor to the existing essence (insofar as it is already constituted in its essentiality)"[839] . From all this Balthasar draws his ultimate consequence -philosophical and theological at the same time-:

> Thus, on the one hand, the freedom of non-subsistent being with respect to all entities can only be guaranteed in its "glory" if it is in turn grounded in a subsistent freedom of the absolute being that is God; in this way, on the other hand, the dignity of the essential form ceases to be threatened by the universal *actus essendi* [= act of existing] and does not remain devoured and consumed as an outdated *gradus essendi* [= level of being], only if the value of its own profile, which makes it exist in this essence can be reconducted to a sovereign and absolute embodying power. If then ontological difference must be brought back, already as duplicity, to a *unicum* (as Plotinus saw it accurately and definitively), then it discovers itself as the authentic "place of the glory of metaphysics," on condition that, in its deepest affirmation of being, the "glory" of its oscillation is not reduced to a mathematical type of necessity (as is basically the case in Heidegger), but as a fact of absolute freedom and, therefore, of grace, it remains in the open oscillation, in which each "pole" has to seek and find its "salvation and fullness" in the other pole: being comes to itself as subsistence only in essence, and this comes to its reality (and thus to the possibility of its self-generation and perfection) only in participation in being[840] .

Thus, for Balthasar-following Ulrich[841] -, "in reality [reigns] a mystery that is beyond poverty and wealth." Indeed, there is nothing richer and fuller than being in its victory over nothingness, and although that same richness only expands "absolutely" "in God" (and that richness is pure potentiality), since God is the *Wholly Other* only insofar as he is also the *Not-Other,* then he can equally envelop all beings in his indivisible being. But also, there is nothing poorer than being, insofar as the act of being is given to all beings with total self-emptying. Consequently, created beings are, at the same time, wealth and poverty. Richness, in their capacity to guard the gift of being; and poverty, because of their limitation in each of the concrete entities. And yet - and here is their magnificent greatness - through an ever

greater dissimilarity, they are always making visible the Infinite .[842]

Following this careful reflection - and the entire historical journey through Western metaphysics - Balthasar deduces some consequences for philosophy and, above all, for Christian theology. We summarize them - without going into detail - in three major assertions. In the first place (*The theological* a priori *of metaphysics*), he affirms that if in such a way "biblical revelation rests on the foundation of the radical difference God-world - and, therefore, of metaphysics - and if from it it is illuminated; then, consequently, metaphysics is perfected in the event of revelation". Indeed, the human being cannot resolve by himself his most fundamental questions and, therefore, neither can metaphysics be "definitively founded" only on the first three differences mentioned[843] . Hence, all the most fundamental human aspects are present in biblical revelation, since "the word of God must be inscribed in the word of being, the word of being in the words of the essences that are intelligibly exchanged between existing entities. In this way, the differences as such become obediently available for the revelation of God"[844] . And the ultimate difference being the difference between God and entity, which is nothing but the oscillation between giver and gift, then the differences are nothing but "the point where the gift signifies the being given (and received) on the part of the giver"[845] .

In the second place (*The Light of Being and Love*) he asks: all that we find most beautiful and good in this contingent and dual world, should it not be found in an inconceivably superior way in God? And, on the other hand, if God creates us - not needing any of us - and, in this way, "communicates to the world, by conferring his non-necessity gratuitously, something of the style of his freedom, of his gift capacity", this clearly comes from his freedom, which can have no other name than *love*. Thus, if God is "something", it must be "love". Then "the fundamental metaphysical act is love within the difference of being". And, consequently, "the fundamental Christian act is love within the God-world difference"[846] . Indeed, what at the metaphysical level is formulated as the relationship between being and entity, in the Christian faith is understood as the relationship between the free word

of God - as absolute love - and the word of the human being - as response.

And, in the third place (*The Christian Contribution to Metaphysics*), something we have already mentioned, he affirms that "the Christian is the man who has to philosophize from faith. Since he believes in God's absolute love for the world, he has to read being in its ontological difference as a sign of love and live according to this principle"[847] . Indeed, Balthasar is convinced that the Christian must guard the metaphysical wonder with which philosophy begins and survives. Because there is no "neutral" metaphysics and each person is free in the metaphysical choice that orients his life, the Christian, in contemplating in Jesus "both the supreme immensity of God's love and the supreme decision of man with respect to God, show the metaphysical act the criterion for knowing whether he already thinks or questions himself with sufficient openness, or whether he has not closed himself too soon". And he ends with a statement that obviously not every philosopher will accept: "In this sense, the Christian is destined to be in our time the guardian of metaphysics"[848] . But, after his long journey, it is well understood in its authentic and deep meaning: the indispensable openness to the Absolute of all human life and thought.

Polarity of the transcendentals of the created being

The second great theme of Balthasar, which we wish to recall here - and which has very personal characteristics- is his development of the transcendentals of being and, in particular, the "polar" realization of them in the created being. This theme has already been exposed extensively in the first chapter -when we explained the *Structure of his thought*- and we now refer to it. There, on the basis of two important texts in which Balthasar synthesized his thought at the end of his life - Attempt *to summarize my thought* and *Epilogue*[849] - we present what is "the heart of his thought"[850] : starting from the fundamental human realization of one's own finitude, the problem of absolute Being must inevitably be posed, which, finally, is only resolved if being itself is *revealed* starting from itself[851] . However, the human being, in order to be able to understand this revelation, must be structurally con-formed

according to this same God. Therefore, all theology presupposes a religious philosophy. Hence Balthasar's fundamental philosophical structure, open to theology, is transformed into a meta-anthropology, that is, in the re-flection on the fourfold difference that we have studied. And he calls it meta-anthropology because the human being discovers the transcendental characteristics of being precisely in his fundamental human experience, which is dialogical: being one in love with his mother, but being at the same time different from his mother, he discovers that this love unifies, is good and true, which brings him joy. From which he can deduce the transcendental characteristics of being: one, good, true and beautiful. Now, in the created being the transcendentals appear polarized in the field of finitude, precisely because only in God do they occur in an absolute way, while in the human being they occur, from the real distinction, in a partial and limited way. It is precisely this polarity of the transcendentals of being that also structures the whole *Trilogy* on the basis of these three transcendentals. Hence the importance of this theme.

Brief look back

At the end of these pages, let us attempt a brief retrospective look, in order to properly understand the presentation given. It seems clear that the first three chapters - *Introductory* Aspects *for Understanding Balthasar* - were intended to offer us a general overview of the context and person of Balthasar, in order to better perceive the meaning and content of his theological proposal. There, together with exhibiting his intellectual biography and the significant contribution that came from his theological communion with Adrienne von Speyr, we exposed the global scheme of his *Trilogy, in* order to enter into its structure of thought, to understand more globally his contribution and then to be able to understand its different theological aspects more particular, from its totality.

The second part - The *structuring axes of his theological proposal* - was a new moment of deepening his structure of (theological) thought, or what he himself has called "the heart of his thought"[852] , based on three chapters that, *roughly speaking,* refer to each of the three parts of the *Trilogy* (although not exactly). Those three chapters delved into each of the three transcendentals of being, elucidating the way they have been worked out by Balthasar in his theological proposal.

Thus, from the *Theological Aesthetics* (beauty), we explained his proposal of fundamental theology, that is, the way in which God reveals himself and makes himself perceptible -and therefore credible-, revealing himself from the form and splendor of what exists, that is, from the beauty of the creaturely being. Then, in harmony with *Theodramatics* (goodness), we explain the use of dramatic instruments to understand the salvific "action" of the incarnate Son and of the Spirit, sent by the Father, which is the Balthasarian way of understanding dogmatic theology, as the content of God's gracious action. These two parts form a "perijoretic" unity and are inseparable, since the manifestation of God to the world is precisely his salvific action in the world. He manifests himself by saving. And by acting, he

also communicates who he is and can be understood because he has assumed a human form. For this reason, in the third chapter, we comment on his *Theology* (truth), reviewing in greater detail the profound interweaving that must always exist between philosophy and theology, and which for Balthasar is inescapable. God can manifest himself and speak to us because the human being is structurally prepared to listen and respond to God, having been created "in the Son," his archetype; and therefore, also the deepest questions of the human being - who is he and where does he come from - find their ultimate answer only in the manifestation and action of his Archetype, the Son. This third part is therefore equally inseparable from the two previous parts.

So Balthasar develops the three transcendentals of created being in the form of a theological aesthetics, a theodramatics and a theology; but also, as fundamental theology , dogmatic theology and something that we can call theological philosophy. And yet, just as we cannot separate the transcendentals of being from each other, it is not possible to understand a fundamental theology without dogmatics and without the (theological) philosophy that supports it. That is what a project of systematic theology means for him and that is what he tries to realize in his voluminous *Trilogy*. It is an all-encompassing vision, where the one who sees more is more right, and where everything can and must be incorporated and fulfilled in the incarnate Son, because we are an image of him.

These are the structuring axes of his *Trilogy,* written in the last 26 years of his life, which have remained as his most relevant theological legacy and within which all the other particular aspects of his theology and his most innovative contributions must be understood. It is also the basic and indispensable context for a correct interpretation and study of the globality of his thought. From there, and integrated in this synthesis, he also goes through the different systematic theological treatises, contributing in each of them theological keys to understand them, bringing to light the problems -sometimes very subtle- that lie behind them, and also contributing novel solutions. A more detailed study of these contributions will be the subject of the

following book[853] . However, before concluding this first work, it may be useful and also suggestive to indicate in which theological fields and areas he makes these more fundamental contributions.

We can underline here nine themes. The concept of *glory,* as the divinity of God that manifests itself in the created through transcendental beauty; creation is then structurally fit for the revelation of God from the "poverty" of the incarnation. His Trinitarian doctrine, which is very novel and is the foundation for understanding all the other themes, in which he reflects profoundly on the existence of the "other" in God, which justifies that God is, from always, *love*. A theological anthropology based on the *dramatic* relationship between the infinite freedom of God and the finite freedom of the human being, who moves with the power of the Spirit in the innermost part of his being. He also develops a theology of history, which he calls the *Christological* theology of history, since, since the Apocalypse, history can be conceived as fundamentally divided by the yes or no of the world to Christ. He studies the fact that the Word, with the incarnation, becomes something other than himself - he assumes the *flesh* with all its human significance - which makes him identify *person and mission* in Jesus of Nazareth, basing on this a Christology that respects both the divine and the human in Jesus and bases our "vocation" in Christ. His soteriology, which is based on the concept of *vicarious* substitution-the *pro nobis* of Jesus Christ-is one of Balthasar's most characteristic themes, and shows the depth of the kenosis of the Son up to the descent into hell. Pneumatology understands the Holy Spirit as the *explicator* of the Son - gift, freedom and witness - whose action in the Church and the world is both subjective and objective. Its ecclesiology is internally linked to mariology, since the Church is the *response* to the incarnate Word, of course within a polar tension between her being immaculate bride and being an institution composed of sinners. And, finally, his eschatology, a very dear theme and with truly innovative contributions, makes a reflection both profound and audacious on the possibility of salvation for all human beings, since all *hope* is placed in Jesus Christ.

Each of these themes would merit a particular study, which has been

elaborated elsewhere and to which we refer. However, as we have already said, each of them also needs to be understood within the integral structure of his theology, which is what we have examined throughout this work. It is not that each of these arguments does not have its own unity, nor can it be studied in particular: of course it can. But in Christian theology, and this is what Balthasar especially wanted to emphasize, the different theological contents must always be conceived of as mutually integrated. This is so because - for Balthasar - integration means that, in Christ, all the longings, all the searches and all the *Logoi spermatikoi* (= seeds of the Word) of the world before and after Christ are summarized; therefore, Jesus is the "concentration" of everything, where everything also finds its unity. The whole - the Son incarnated as Archetype - is always in each fragment of reality and, therefore, each fragment must be understood from that whole. This principle of integration is precisely the one that has justified, and furthermore demands, that before entering into the particular themes of Balthasar's theology, the globality of his theological system must be studied, understood and expounded. And it is the one that demands, then, that each particular theme always be studied from the totality of the Balthasarian proposal.

To conclude, let us make a final evaluation of the theology presented here, without repeating what we have already said in these pages. First of all, we must highlight Balthasar's attempt itself, because it is truly immense, and it is well justified and adequately achieved. It is very remarkable the fact that it is based on the transcendentals of being, that is, on the most common thing that exists -being-, because this opens the possibility of understanding the Christian revelation to the totality of humanity, which is one of the primordial aspects of the manifestation of God: precisely to be able to reach everyone. While there are various ways to demonstrate this universality, Balthasar has chosen a particularly appropriate path with a coherent philosophical substratum. Secondly, beyond the intimate relationship between the three transcendentals of being and the three parts of the *Trilogy*, it also seems interesting the relationship that Balthasar establishes - particularly- between aesthetics and theodramatics. With this, he

underlines that the historical character - which is structuring of the human being - must, for this very reason, be an integral part of the concrete form in which the revelation of God is carried out. And, therefore, the Christian - as spirit, freedom and history - cannot then disregard these same aspects when thinking and understanding the revelation received. And finally, the chosen order: beauty, goodness and truth. This order structures and understands Christianity from its true center, by pointing out that, in the first place, it is a *manifestation* of God, that is, a revelation of the goodness of God and of his truth; and therefore it is not primarily a truth, nor mere truth, but primarily a *presence*. This has not always been emphasized with all its consequences, as our author has done here.

Finally, a question remains. Having presented so coherently - and convincingly - the global structure of revelation, will he then be able, with the same coherence and depth, to integrate into this same structure the different aspects and places - or treatises - of theology? This has sometimes been questioned. I think that fundamentally he does it well, but this has to be proven by studying each of his themes in particular. In any case, this is one of the great challenges he faces in the elaboration of his *Trilogy*. Any systematic structuring, precisely because it is so, even if it seeks coherence and integration, since the mystery of Jesus is always greater, will never be able to explain it fully, much less in a "worldly" reflective system. God is always greater, but his glory is reflected in his creature - and, therefore, can also be reflected in the reflection on the revelation that she makes: this is precisely his mystery, on which - in spite of everything - every Christian is called to reflect.

Suggested bibliography

Some books and articles that can help the reader to further deepen his understanding of Balthasar are listed here. It is by no means intended to be a complete list, but only a select list of good biographical texts and general introductions to his life, work or theology. As the aim of this short list is simply to illuminate the choice of some useful reading, in order to delve somewhat deeper into his work, this help is necessarily a "painful" selection of texts within a very wide universe. For this reason, perhaps not even some of the best texts are included and certainly some very good books and articles have been left out. I have only wanted to include a list of good studies, accessible because of their language or topicality, that allow the reader to continue to know Balthasar (placing first those that seemed to me the most accessible and general). Although it goes without saying that the best way to enter into his thought will always be -evidently- to read Balthasar himself, whose main works have practically all been translated and published in Spanish by Ediciones Encuentro. Some of the texts presented here have already been quoted throughout the work.

For a complete bibliographical review, you can visit the *Hans Urs von Balthasar Stiftung* website, which has a very complete bibliography on Balthasar: http://www.johannes-verlag.de/jh_huvb_sekund.htm.

Biographies:

Manfred Lochbrunner, *Hans Urs von Balthasar. 1905-1988. Die Biographie eines Jahrhunderttheologen,* Echter, Würzburg 2020.

Elio Guerriero, *Hans Urs von Balthasar,* Edizioni Paoline, Cinisello Balsamo 1991 (French and German translation available).

General introductions to his life and work:

Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Bibliographie 1925-2005,* Johannes Verlag Einsiedeln, Freiburg 2005. Also at: http://www.johannes-verlag.de.

David L. Schindler (ed.), *Hans Urs von Balthasar. His life and work,*

Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1991.

Peter Henrici, *Hans Urs von Balthasar. Aspekte seiner Sendung,* Johannes Verlag Einsiedeln, Freiburg 2008.

Karl Lehmann - Walter Kasper (eds.), *Hans Urs von Balthasar. Gestalt und Werk,* Verlag für christliche Literatur Communio, Köln 1989 (Italian and Portuguese translation available).

Michael Schulz, *Hans Urs von Balthasar begegnen,* Sankt Ulrich Verlag, Augsburg 2002.

Werner Löser, *Kleine Hinführung zu Hans Urs von Balthasar,* Herder, Freiburg 2005.

Vincent Holzer, *Hans Urs von Balthasar 1905-1988,* Les éditions du Cerf, Paris 2012.

General introductions to his theology:

Rodrigo Polanco, *Hans Urs von Balthasar II. Aspectos centrales de su* Trilogía, Ediciones Encuentro, Madrid 2021.

Angelo Scola, *Hans Urs von Balthasar. Un estilo teológico,* Ediciones Encuentro, Madrid 1997.

Edward T. Oakes - David Moss (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2004.

Bede McGregor - Thomas Norris, *The Beauty of Christ. An Introduction to the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar,* T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh 1994.

Karen Kilby, *Balthasar. A (very) critical introduction,* W.B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., Grand Rapids (Mich.) 2012.

Philippe Barbarin, *Théologie et sainteté. Introduction à Hans Urs von Balthasar,* Parole et Silence, Paris 2017.

Aidan Nichols, *The Word Has Been Abroad. A Guide Through Balthasar's Aesthetics,* T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh 1998.

Aidan Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth. A Guide Through Balthasar's Dramatics,* T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh 2000.

Aidan Nichols, *Say it is Pentecost. A Guide Through Balthasar's Logic,* T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh 2001.

Specific bibliography for each chapter:

The readings are listed in order of importance, according to language, year and, above all, relevance to the topic.

Chapter I

Recommended reading of Hans Urs von Balthasar: Zu seinem Werk (ed. by Cornelia Capol), Johannes Verlag Einsiedeln, Freiburg i.Br. 22000, which is the compilation of his retrospective views (Italian translation exists): in 1945: "Hans Urs von Balthasar presents himself"; in 1955: "Brief general plan of my books"; in 1965: "Rendering an account"; in 1975: "Another decade"; and finally, in 1988: "I try to summarize my thought" (published in Spanish in *Communio [Madrid]* 10 [1988], pp. 284-288); plus an interview given in *Herder Korrespondenz,* February 30, 1976 (published in Spanish in Michael Albus, "Espíritu y Fuego. Una entrevista a Hans Urs von Balthasar," in *Communio [Madrid] Nueva época* 2 [2006], pp. 118-138). Another interview in Angelo Scola, *Hans Urs von Balthasar. Examinadlo todo y quedos con lo bueno,* Ediciones Encuentro, Madrid 2007. Cf. also Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Unser Auftrag. Bericht und Entwurf,* Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1984.

For a biography: the best so far are Manfred Lochbrunner's recent book, *Hans Urs von Balthasar 1905-1988. Die Biographie eines Jahrhunderttheologen,* Echter, Würzburg 2020; and the classic work by Elio Guerriero, *Hans Urs von Balthasar*, Edizioni Paoline, Cinisello Balsamo 1991. Very good synthesis in Peter Henrici, "Semblanza de Hans Urs von Balthasar," in *Communio (Madrid)* 11 (1989), pp. 356-391. Cf. also Aidan Nichols, *The Word Has Been Abroad. A Guide Through Balthasar's Aesthetics,* The Catholic University of America Press, Washington DC 1998, pp. ix-xx.

Chapter II

Recommended reading of Hans Urs von Balthasar: "Intento de resumir mi pensamiento," in *Communio (Madrid)* 10 (1988), pp. 284-288; *Teologica,* I, pp. 11-23; *Zu seinem Werk* (ed. by Cornelia Capol), Johannes Verlag Einsiedeln, Freiburg i.Br. 22000, pp. 67-75; 79-85.

From other authors: Four studies are important. A general overview presented by Olegario González de Cardedal, "La obra teológica de Hans Urs von Balthasar", in *Communio. Revista Católica Internacional*

(Madrid) 10 (1988), pp. 365-396. Two brief articles by Peter Henrici, which explain the structure of the *Trilogy:* "Die Trilogie Hans Urs von Balthasars. Eine Theologie der europäischen Kultur," in *Internationale Katholische Zeitschrift Communio* 34/2 (2005), pp. 117-127 (translated into Spanish by Alberto Espezel, "La Trilogía de Balthasar," in *Communio. Revista Católica Internacional [Buenos Aires]* 12/3 [2005], pp. 17-23); and "Die Struktur der Trilogie von Hans Urs *von* Balthasar," in Id. *Aspekte seiner Sendung,* Johannes Verlag Einsiedeln, Freiburg 2008, pp. 121-132. And the three-volume work by Aidan Nichols, which summarizes the entire *Trilogy*: *The Word Has Been Abroad. A Guide Through Balthasar's Aesthetics,* The Catholic University of America Press, Washington DC 1998; *No Bloodless Myth. A Guide Through Balthasar's Dramatics,* The Catholic University of America Press, Washington DC 2000; *Say It Is Pentecost. A Guide Through Balthasar's Logic,* The Catholic University of America Press, Washington DC 2001.

Chapter III

Recommended reading by Hans Urs von Balthasar: Unser Auftrag. Bericht und Entwurf (= Our task. Recount and plan), Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1984; *A first look at Adrienne von Speyr,* Ediciones San Juan, Madrid 2012.

From other authors: Anton Strukelj, "Hans Urs von Balthasar e Adrienne von Speyr. L'unità di due opere", in *Rivista Internazionale di Teologia e Cultura Communio* 203 (2005), pp. 27-43; Jacques Servais, "Per una valutazione dell'influusso di Adrienne von Speyr su Hans Urs von Balthasar", in *Rivista Teologica di Lugano* 6 (1/2001), pp. 67-89; Rino Fisichella, "Hans Urs von Balthasar e Adrienne von Speyr. L'inseparabilità delle due opere," in *Rivista Internazionale di Teologia e Cultura Communio* 156 (1997), pp. 61-74; Luis G. Robles, "La influencia de Adrienne von Speyr en la teología de Hans Urs von Balthasar," in *La misión de Hans Urs von Balthasar y Adrienne von Speyr en el inicio del tercer milenio* (Actas Congreso, Puebla [Mexico], 17-18 November 2007), Fundación Maior, Madrid 2008, pp. 59- 80; Paola Ricci Sindoni, "Adrienne von Speyr e Hans Urs von Balthasar: tracce di un incontro," in Id, *Adrienne von Speyr (1902-1967). Storia di una*

esistenza teologica, Società Editrice Internazionale, Torino 1996, pp. 19-32.

Chapter IV

Recommended reading of Hans Urs von Balthasar: Gloria, I, pp. 21-45; 110-118; *Epilogue,* pp. 15-40.

From other authors: Rino Fisichella, "Fundamentaltheologisches bei Hans Urs von Balthasar", in Karl Lehmann - Walter Kasper (eds.), *Hans Urs von Balthasar: Gestalt und Werk,* Verlag für christliche Literatur Communio, Köln 1989, pp. 298-311 (Italian and Portuguese translation available); Larry Chapp, "Revelation", in Edward T. Oakes - David Moss (eds.), The Cambridge Companion to Hans *Urs von* Balthasar*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2004*, pp. 11-23. Oakes - David Moss (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2004, pp. 11-23.

Chapter V

Recommended reading of Hans Urs von Balthasar: Theodramatics, I, pp. 19-26; 119-125; 242-250; 627-630; *Theodramatics,* II, pp. 13-23. Depending on the particular topic of interest, one can read the pages indicated for this purpose in this chapter.

From other authors: Alois Haas, "Hans Urs von Balthasar. Theatricality and Postmodernity. 'Hans Urs von Balthasar's Principle of Theatricality,'" in Cecilia I. Avenatti de Palumbo, *Languages of God for the 21st Century. Aesthetics, theater and literature as theological imaginaries,* Edições Subiaco, Juiz de Fora 2007, pp. 464-482; Ben Quash, "Theo-drama," in Edward T. Oakes - David Moss (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs Von Balthasar,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2004, pp. 143-157.

Chapter VI

Recommended reading by Hans Urs von Balthasar: Gloria, V, pp. 563-603; *Epilogue,* pp. 43-80; *Gloria,* IV, pp. 353-368; *Theologica,* I, pp. 25-34. In that order of importance.

From other authors: Peter Henrici, "Zur Philosophie Hans Urs von Balthasars," in Peter Henrici, *Hans Urs von Balthasar. Aspekte seiner*

Sendung, Johannes Verlag Einsiedeln, Freiburg 2008, pp. 75-101 (Italian and English translation available); Emmanuel J. Bauer, "Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988). His philosophical work," in Cecilia I. Avenatti de Palumbo, *Languages of God for the 21st Century. Estética, teatro y literatura como imaginarios teológicos,* Edições Subiaco, Juiz de Fora 2007, pp. 742-776; Anneliese Meis, "El ser, plenitud atravesada por la nada, según Hans Urs von Balthasar", in *Teología y Vida* 50 (2009), pp. 387-419; Fergus Kerr, "Balthasar and metaphysics", in Edward T. Oakes - David Moss (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs Von Balthasar,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2004, pp. 224-238; Martin Bieler, "Meta-antropologia e cristologia. A riguardo della filosofia di Hans Urs von Balthasar," in *Rivista Internazionale di Teologia e Cultura Communio* 117 (1991), pp. 107-121.

Index of authors

Table of contents

[1] In 1945: "Hans Urs von Balthasar presents himself"; in 1955: "Brief general plan of my books"; in 1965: "Giving an account"; in 1975: "Another decade"; and finally, in 1988: "An attempt to summarize my thought". All these texts, plus an interview given in *Herder Korrespondenz,* in 1976, have been published in a work as a whole, prepared by Cornelia Capol: Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Zu seinem Werk,* Johannes Verlag Einsiedeln, Freiburg i.Br. 22000. He also refers to his works, in relation here to the influence of Adrienne von Speyr, in Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Unser Auftrag. Bericht und Entwurf* (= Our Task. Recount and Plan), Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1984.

[2] For example, *El Corazón del mundo,* Ediciones Encuentro, Madrid 1991 (German original 1945); *Das Ganze im Fragment. Aspekte der Geschichtstheologie* (= The Whole in the Fragment. Aspects of the Theology of History), Johannes Verlag Einsiedeln, Freiburg i.Br. 21990 (German original 1963); *Solo el amor es digno de fe,* Sígueme, Salamanca 22006 (German original 1963).

[3] As it could be perhaps, in the case of Karl Rahner, *Curso fundamental sobre la fe. Introduction to the concept of Christianity,* Herder, Barcelona 1979 (original German 1976).

[4] Balthasar, *Zu seinem Werk,* op. cit. p. 79.

[5] Ibid., p. 68.

[6] In an interview in 1976, he said: "You speak to me like a theologian or a writer of theological works. On this, I would like to note a couple of things [...] Because first of all I have to maintain a hierarchy of values, so to speak. At the center is the Community of St. John [...] I am in first place for it and its members [...] In second place is my publishing house [... which] publishes first of all the enormous work of Adrienne von Speyr [...] Only then, in third place, would I put my own production: it is a help also for our community and for the men who are interested in that spirit" (Michael Albus, "Spirit and Fire. An interview with Hans Urs von Balthasar", in *Communio [Madrid] Nueva época* 2 [2006], pp. 118-138, here p. 118).

[7] In this brief biographical sketch I follow Elio Guerriero, *Hans Urs von Balthasar. Eine Monographie*, Johannes Verlag Einsiedeln, Freiburg 1993 (German translation of the original Italian monograph: *Hans Urs von Balthasar,* Edizioni Paoline, Cinisello Balsamo 1991), and Peter Henrici, "Semblanza de Hans Urs von Balthasar," in *Communio (Madrid)* 11 (1989), pp. 356-391, in addition to Balthasar's autobiographical texts. Manfred Lochbrunner's work, *Hans Urs von Balthasar 1905-1988. Die Biographie eines Jahrhunderttheologen,* Echter, Würzburg 2020, appeared when this chapter was already written, but I have nevertheless revised it and used it in some complementary aspects.

[8] His nephew, Peter Henrici, rightly and ironically states: "Urs von Balthasar has written more books than a normal man can read in a lifetime" ("Semblanza...", op. cit., p. 356). His entire bibliography can be reviewed in Hans Urs von Balthasar (ed. by Cornelia Capol - Claudia Müller), *Bibliographie 1925-2005*, Johannes Verlag Einsiedeln, Freiburg i.Br 2005. It lists 121 books, 537 articles, 114 contributions to books, 110 translations of books, 29 anthologies, 103 forewords, 93 reviews; in addition to the 60 volumes written by him with the *dictation* of Adrienne von Speyr.

[9] Henri de Lubac affirmed that Balthasar was "perhaps the most learned [man] of our time" ("Un testigo de Cristo en la Iglesia: Hans Urs von Balthasar", in *Paradoja y misterio de la Iglesia,* Sígueme, Salamanca 1967, pp. 183-214, here p. 186).

[10] They were his lowest marks in the final school examination (cf. Lochbrunner, *Balthasar. Die Biographie*..., op. cit., p. 47).

[11] Balthasar, *Unser Auftrag*..., op. cit., pp. 31 and 30 respectively.

[12] Henrici, "Semblanza...", op. cit., p. 358.

[13] Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Acknowledgment of the Laureate at the Wolfgang Amadeus

Mozart Award Ceremony on May 22, 1987 in Innsbruck," in Guerriero, *Hans Urs von Balthasar. Eine Monographie*, op. cit. pp. 419-424, here p. 420.

[14] Balthasar, *Unser Auftrag...*, op. cit., p. 31.

[15] Ib.

[16] Balthasar, *Zu seinem Werk,* op. cit. p. 76.

[17] Henrici, "Semblanza...", op. cit., p. 383.

[18] Abhandlung zur Erlangung der Doktorwürde der philosophischen Fakultät I der Universität Zürich. Selbstverlag des Verfassers, Zürich, 219 pp.

[19] Cf. Aidan Nichols, *The Word Has Been Abroad. A Guide Through Balthasar's Aesthetics,* The Catholic University of America Press, Washington DC 1998, p. xi.

[20] Balthasar never considered himself a theologian by profession: "I have never done a doctorate in theology; my studies have been in German Philology (Germanistics)" (Albus, "Spirit and Fire...", op. cit., p. 118).

[21] 3 vols., A. Pustet, Salzburg 1937-1939.

[22] Jorge Sans Villa - Ramón María Sans Villa, ¿Por qué me hice sacerdote? Encuesta, Sígueme, Salamanca [4]1965, pp. 29-32, here p. 32. Very illuminating is this brief testimony about his vocation, written at the end of 1959.

[23] Balthasar, *Zu seinem Werk,* op. cit. p. 76.

[24] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Examine everything and keep the good. Interview by Angelo Scola*, Ediciones Encuentro, Madrid 2007, p. 11.

[25] Cf. Aurelius Augustinus, Über *die Psalmen (Enarrationes in Psalmos) Auswahl und Einleitung,* Hegner, Leipzig 1936; Aurelius Augustinus, *Das Antlitz der Kirche. Auswahl und Einleitung,* Benziger, Einsiedeln-Köln 1942; Irenäus, *Geduld des Reifens. Die christliche Antwort auf den Gnostischen Mythos des zweiten Jahrhunderts. Übersetzung und Einführung,* Benno Schwabe, Basel 1943; Origenes, *Geist und Feuer. Ein Aufbau aus seinen Schriften. Mit einer Einführung,* Otto Müller, Salzburg 1938; Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Le Mystérion d'Origène," in *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 26 (1936), pp. 513-562; ibid., 27 (1937), pp. 38-64; reworked as *Parole et Mystère chez Origène,* Cerf, Paris 1957; Id., *Présence et Pensée. Essai sur la philosophie religieuse de Grégoire de Nysse,* Beauchesne, Paris 1942; Gregor von Nyssa, *Der versiegelte Quell. Auslegung des Hohen Liedes.In Kürzung übertragen und eingeleitet,* Otto Müller, Salzburg 1939; Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Kosmische Liturgie. Maximus der Bekenner: Höhe und Krise des griechischen Weltbilds,* Herder, Freiburg 1941; Id., *Die Gnostische Centurien des Maximus Confessor,* Herder, Freiburg 1941.

[26] Balthasar, *Zu seinem Werk,* op. cit., p. 13. Cf. ibid., pp. 31-32.

[27] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Bernanos,* Henger, Köln-Olten 1954.

[28] Balthasar, *Examine Everything...*, op. cit., p. 12.

[29] Sans Villa, Why I became a *priest...*, op. cit., p. 32.

[30] Henrici, "Semblanza...", op. cit., p. 364.

[31] To name a few, J. W. Goethe, Novalis (G. P. F. von Hardenberg), F. Nietzsche, F. Brentano, P. Claudel, Ch. Péguy, G. Bernanos.

[32] *Das Weizenkorn. Aphorismen,* Räber, Luzern 1944.

[33] *Das Herz der Welt,* Arche, Zürich 1944.

[34] Madrid, Ediciones Encuentro, 1992 (German original of 1950, reedited and expanded in 1959).

[35] Balthasar, *Zu seinem Werk,* op. cit. pp. 21-22.

[36] Cf. Apostolic Constitution *Provida Mater Ecclesia*, February 2, 1947.

[37] *Der Laie und der Ordensstand,* Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1948. He later changed the title to *Der Laie und der Rätestand*, correcting the previous failed title.

[38] Balthasar, *Zu seinem Werk,* op. cit. p. 50.

[39] Compiled in *Verbum caro. Ensayos teológicos*, I, Ediciones Encuentro, Madrid 22001, pp. 195-223 (German original of 1948).
[40] *Verbum caro...*, op. cit., p. 195.
[41] Ibid., p. 222.
[42] Benjamin Dahlke, "Balthasar im Dioalog mit Barth," in *Internationale katholische Zeitschrift Communio* 47 (2019), pp. 438-446, here p. 440.
[43] Ibid., p. 438.
[44] On this friendship and the similarities and differences between their theologies, cf. Dahlke, "Balthasar im Dioalog...," op. cit.
[45] *Karl Barth. Darstellung und Deutung seiner Theologie,* Summa Verlag, Olten 1951. It had been written before, but could not be published because it did not obtain the *imprimatur*.
[46] Cf. chap. III: "Two halves of a whole". The theological relationship between Hans Urs von Balthasar and Adrienne von Speyr.
[47] Cf. detailed details of this painful period in Lochbrunner, *Balthasar. Die Biographie...*, op. cit., pp. 263-288.
[48] "Farewell letter addressed in German to the Society of Jesus, March 19, 1950," in Guerriero, *Hans Urs von Balthasar. Eine Monographie*, op. cit. pp. 402-408, here pp. 405-406.
[49] Sans Villa, Why did I become a *priest?* op. cit., pp. 31-32.
[50] Cf. Balthasar, *Unser Auftrag...*, op. cit.
[51] Henrici, "Semblanza...", op. cit., p. 371.
[52] *Schleifung der Bastionen. Von der Kirche in dieser Zeit,* Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1952.
[53] Balthasar, *Zu seinem Werk,* op. cit. p. 44.
[54] Ibid., pp. 43-44.
[55] *Thomas von Aquin. Besondere Gnadengaben und die zwei Wege menschlichen Lebens. Kommentar zur Summa Theologica II-II, 171-182*, F. H. Kerle / A. Pustet, Heidelberg-München und Graz-Wien-Salzburg 1953.
[56] Ediciones Encuentro, Madrid 1985 (original German 1955).
[57] Balthasar, *Zu seinem Werk,* op. cit. p. 55.
[58] Ib.
[59] *Thessalonicher- und Pastoralbriefe für das betrachtende Gebet erschlossen,* Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1955.
[60] *Therese of Lisieux. Historia de una misión,* Herder, Barcelona 1957 (original German 1950).
[61] *Elisabeth von Dijon und ihre geistliche Sendung,* Jakob Hegner Verlag, Köln-Olten 1952.
[62] Op. cit. (original German 1960).
[63] Balthasar, *Zu seinem Werk,* op. cit. p. 53.
[64] Ediciones Encuentro, Madrid 2001 (original German 1961).
[65] Balthasar, *Zu seinem Werk*, op. cit. pp. 54-55.
[66] *Calderón de la Barca, Das große Welttheater. Übertragen und für die Bühne eingerichtet,* Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1959.
[67] Lubac, "A Witness...", op. cit., p. 183.
[68] On this topic, cf. Manfred Lochbrunner, "Hans Urs von Balthasar und das Zweite Vatikanum. Eine verpasste Chance?", in *Theologie und Philosophie* 87 (2012), pp. 396-420.
[69] On this work, cf. infra, chapter II: A global look at the *Trilogy*.
[70] "Presentation of the Spanish edition," in *Communio (Madrid)* 1 (1979), pp. 5-11, here pp. 6, 5 and 6, respectively.
[71] Balthasar, *Unser Auftrag...*, op. cit.
[72] Ediciones San Juan, Madrid 2012. Translation of *Erster Blick auf Adrienne von Speyr,* Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1968, which also includes: Adrienne von Speyr, *Oraciones marianas, Textos de la obra posthuma, Cuadernos de temas*, which, in turn, is an anthology taken

from: *Junto a Dios y junto a los hombres*, *La Palabra y la mística II*. *Objective Mysticism*, *Book of All Saints. Antología de retratos,* and *Cuaderno de temas*, respectively.

[73] Cf. Henrici, "Semblanza...", op. cit., p. 378.

[74] *Theologie der drei Tage,* Benziger, Einsiedeln 1969. Written for a joint work as "The Paschal Mystery," in Johannes Feiner - Magnus Löhrer (dirs.), *Mysterium salutis. Manual de teología como historia de la salvación,* III/2, Cristiandad, Madrid 1971, pp. 143-335.

[75] Op. cit.

[76] BAC, Madrid 1981 (German original of 1974).

[77] Balthasar, *Zu seinem Werk,* op. cit., p. 89.

[78] Ediciones Encuentro, Madrid 1994 (original German 1977).

[79] Sígueme, Salamanca 2000 (original German 1965).

[80] Sígueme, Salamanca 1968 (original German 1966).

[81] Published in Spanish as *El cristianismo es un don,* Paulinas, Madrid 1972 (original German 1971).

[82] Ediciones Encuentro, Madrid 1988 (original German 1975).

[83] Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1979.

[84] Published in Spanish as *A los creyentes desconcertados,* Narcea, Madrid 1983 (original German 1980).

[85] Henrici, "Semblanza...", op. cit., p. 385.

[86] Kösel-Verlag, Munich 1969.

[87] Ediciones Encuentro, Madrid 1979 (original German 1972).

[88] *Was dürfen wir hoffen?,* Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1986. Published in Spanish as "¿Qué podemos esperar?", in Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Tratado sobre el infierno*, Edicep, Valencia 1999, pp. 7-128.

[89] *Kleiner Diskurs über die Hölle,* Schwabenverlag, Ostfildern 1987. Published in English in Balthasar, *Treatise on Hell,* op. cit., pp. 129-175.

[90] Cf. *Epilogue,* p. 117.

[91] Cf. the interview with Raphael Suter in the *Basler Zeitung*, May 31, 1988, quoted in Lochbrunner, *Balthasar. Die Biographie...*, op. cit., pp. 638-639.

[92] Joseph Ratzinger, "Homily delivered at the funeral of Hans Urs von Balthasar," in *Communio (Madrid)* 10 (1988), pp. 353-354.

[93] I take up in this and the following part of the chapter an earlier work: Rodrigo Polanco, "Understanding von Balthasar's Trilogy," in *Theologica Xaveriana* 184 (2017), pp. 411-430.

[94] Balthasar, *Zu seinem Werk,* op. cit. p. 19.

[95] Ibid., p. 43.

[96] Ibid., p. 67.

[97] Ib.

[98] Ibid, p. 10. Cf. ibid, pp. 36-37.

[99] Balthasar, *Unser Auftrag...*, op. cit., p. 32.

[100] Balthasar, *Zu seinem Werk,* op. cit. p. 75.

[101] Balthasar, *Examine Everything...*, op. cit., p. 10.

[102] Balthasar, *Zu seinem Werk,* op. cit. p. 75.

[103] Cf. ibid., pp. 9-10 and 37.

[104] Ibid., p. 76.

[105] *Epilogue*, p. 52.

[106] Balthasar, *Zu seinem Werk,* op. cit. p. 76.

[107] Balthasar, *Examine Everything...*, op. cit., p. 11.

[108] Balthasar, *Zu seinem Werk,* op. cit., p. 12.

[109] Ibid., pp. 77-78.

110 Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1959.
111 Balthasar, *Zu seinem Werk,* op. cit. p. 78.
112 Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1998.
113 Balthasar, *Unser Auftrag...*, op. cit., p. 33.
114 Nichols, *The Word...*, op. cit., p. xv.
115 Cf. Balthasar, *Bibliographie...*, op. cit., p. 162.
116 Balthasar, *Zu seinem Werk*, op. cit., p. 11.
117 Ibid., p. 76.
118 Albus, "Spirit and Fire...", op. cit., p. 137.
119 Balthasar, *Zu seinem Werk*, op. cit. p. 10.
120 Cf. *Gloria,* II, p. 70.
121 Balthasar, *Zu seinem Werk,* op. cit. p. 92.
122 Ibid., p. 11.
123 *Theology,* I, p. 11.
124 *Theology,* I, p. 12.
125 *Theology,* I, p. 13.
126 *Theology,* I, p. 17.
127 *Theology,* I, p. 18.
128 Balthasar, *Zu seinem Werk,* op. cit. p. 10.
129 Ib.
130 Sans Villa, Why I became a *priest...,* op. cit. p. 14.
131 Balthasar, *Zu seinem Werk,* op. cit. p. 20.
132 Ibid., p. 44.
133 Ib.
134 Cf. ibid., p. 38.
135 Ibid., p. 24.
136 Ibid., pp. 76-77.
137 Op. cit.
138 Balthasar, *Zu seinem Werk,* op. cit. p. 22.
139 Ibid., p. 76.
140 Ibid., p. 90.
141 Balthasar, *Examine Everything...*, op. cit., p. 78.
142 Cf. Balthasar, *Zu seinem Werk,* op. cit., pp. 90-91.
143 Cf. *Theodramática,* V, p. 15-16.
144 On the theological relationship between the two cf. infra, chap. III: "Two halves of a whole". The theological relationship between Hans Urs von Balthasar and Adrienne von Speyr.
145 *Epilogue,* p. 15.
146 *Epilogue,* p. 16.
147 Balthasar, *Zu seinem Werk,* op. cit. p. 54.
148 Ibid., p. 22.
149 Ibid., pp. 86-87.
150 Ibid., p. 89.
151 Collected in Balthasar, *Zu seinem Werk,* op. cit. In 1955 he stated, "Whoever turns fifty and has written a great deal of apparently very disparate material may well have reason to reflect [on what he has written]. And not least out of a concern for the reader, who is the closest thing he has, and who most of the time is an unknown person and who comes into contact with the author when he reads something that the author finished long ago, which gives a new presence to something that lies far in the past. Hence, he is concerned to make

things easier for him by pointing out to him the connections and intentions in the literary work. Because this [= pointing out connections and intentions] cannot be done about the work of one's own life, whose decisions lie elsewhere and at a deeper level. But even so, it is not possible to make a clear separation between these two aspects; for a book must reflect much of the meaning that the writer seeks to give to his own existence, even if that meaning is often stamped on the book against the direct will and consideration of the author" (Ib., p. 17).

152 Cf. *Gloria,* I, pp. 15-17; *Theologica,* I, pp. 11-23; *Epilogue,* pp. 9-11.

153 Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Intento de resumir mi pensamiento," in *Communio (Madrid)* 10 (1988), pp. 284-288. It was written in French and published as "Essai de résumer ma pensé", in *Revue des Deux Mondes* (October 1988), pp. 100-106. Also collected in Balthasar, *Zu seinem Werk,* op. cit., pp. 95-101.

154 Ibid., p. 284.

155 Ib.

156 Ib.

157 *Epilogue,* p. 9.

158 Balthasar, "An Attempt to Summarize...," op. cit., p. 284. Cf.

159 *Epilogue,* p. 47.

160 *Epilogue,* p. 46.

161 *Epilogue,* p. 47*.

162 *Epilogue,* pp. 47-48*.

163 Balthasar, "An Attempt to Summarize...," op. cit. pp. 284-285*.

164 Ibid., p. 285.

165 Ibid. (translation modified according to the original, since the Spanish edition omits a sentence).

166 *Epilogue,* p. 46*.

167 Balthasar, "Intento de resumir...", op. cit., p. 286 (translation modified according to the original, since the Spanish edition omits one sentence).

168 Ib.

169 Ibid., p. 286*.

170 Ibid., p. 286.

171 Ib.

172 *Epilogue,* p. 53.

173 *Epilogue,* p. 52.

174 *Epilogue,* p. 55.

175 *Epilogue,* p. 56.

176 *Epilogue,* p. 63.

177 Cited in *Epilogue,* p. 63.

178 *Epilogue,* p. 64.

179 *Epilogue,* p. 71.

180 *Epilogue,* p. 74*.

181 *Epilogue,* p. 71.

182 *Epilogue,* p. 77.

183 *Epilogue,* p. 71.

184 *Epilogue,* pp. 71-72.

185 *Epilogue,* p. 72.

186 *Epilogue,* p. 79.

187 *Epilogue,* p. 79*.

188 Cf. Balthasar, "An Attempt to Summarize...," op. cit. p. 287.

[189] Ibid., p. 288.
[190] Ibid., pp. 286-287.
[191] Cf. ibid., p. 287.
[192] *Theology,* I, p. 22.
[193] Balthasar, "An Attempt to Summarize...," op. cit. p. 287.
[194] *Theology,* I, p. 22.
[195] *Theology,* I, p. 22.
[196] Cf. *Theology,* I, p. 23.
[197] Cf. Balthasar, "An Attempt to Summarize...," op. cit. p. 287.
[198] *Theology,* I, p. 23.
[199] *Theology,* I, p. 23.
[200] *Theology,* I, p. 23.
[201] *Epilogue,* p. 9.
[202] *Gloria,* I, p. 22.
[203] *Gloria,* II, p. 27.
[204] *Theology,* I, p. 22.
[205] Cf. *Gloria,* IV, p. 20.
[206] *Theology,* I, p. 22.
[207] Cf. *Theodramática,* V, pp. 55-57.
[208] Cf. *Theology,* I, p. 11.
[209] Cf. John O'Donnell, "The Logic of Divine Glory," in Bede McGregor - Thomas Norris (eds.), *The Beauty of Christ. An Introduction to the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar,* T&T Clark, Edinburgh 1994, pp. 161-170.
[210] *Wahrheit. Ein Versuch. Erstes Buch. Wahrheit der Welt,* Benziger, Einsiedeln 1947.
[211] *Theology,* I, p. 23.
[212] *Theology,* II, p. 69.
[213] Cf. *Epilogue,* pp. 15-16.
[214] Cf. Henrici, "Die Trilogie...", op. cit., p. 118.
[215] The three texts by Aidan Nichols mentioned at the end of the book in the "Suggested Bibliography" for Chapter II are very useful for this purpose.
[216] *Gloria,* I, p. 31.
[217] *Gloria,* I, p. 116.
[218] Cf. *Gloria,* I, p. 123.
[219] Cf. *Gloria,* I, pp. 323-336.
[220] It is what has usually been translated by "Totally Other" (*Ganz Andere*) and "*Non-Aliud*" (*Non-aliud*), which do not exactly render the meaning.
[221] *Gloria,* II, p. 28.
[222] *Gloria,* II, p. 15.
[223] *Gloria,* II, pp. 18-19.
[224] *Gloria,* II, p. 103*.
[225] *Gloria,* II, p. 110.
[226] *Gloria,* II, p. 19-20.
[227] Cf. *Gloria,* III, p. 182.
[228] *Gloria,* II, p. 20.
[229] *Gloria,* III, p. 277.
[230] *Gloria,* III, p. 287.
[231] *Gloria,* III, p. 355.
[232] *Gloria,* III, pp. 402-403.
[233] *Gloria,* III, p. 407.

[234] Cf. *Gloria,* IV, p. 47.
[235] Cf. *Gloria,* IV, pp. 153-154.
[236] *Gloria*, IV*,* p. 184.
[237] *Gloria*, IV*,* p. 186*.
[238] Cf. *Gloria,* IV, p. 205.
[239] *Gloria*, IV*,* p. 215.
[240] Cf. *Gloria,* IV, pp. 290-292.
[241] *Gloria*, IV*,* p. 292*.
[242] Cf. *Gloria,* IV, pp. 360-362 and 364-365.
[243] *Gloria,* V*,* p. 17.
[244] *Gloria,* V*,* p. 196.
[245] *Gloria*, V*,* pp. 197-199.
[246] *Gloria,* V*,* p. 199.
[247] *Gloria,* V*,* p. 220.
[248] *Gloria*, V*,* pp. 233-234.
[249] *Gloria*, V*,* p. 234.
[250] *Gloria*, V*,* p. 338.
[251] *Gloria*, V*,* p. 383.
[252] *Gloria,* V, pp. 417-418.
[253] *Gloria,* V, pp. 418-419.
[254] *Gloria,* V, pp. 502-503.
[255] *Gloria,* V, p. 548.
[256] *Gloria,* V, p. 552.
[257] Cf. *Gloria,* V, p. 557.
[258] *Gloria,* V, pp. 564-565.
[259] *Gloria,* V, p. 573.
[260] *Gloria,* V, p. 577.
[261] *Gloria,* V, p. 581.
[262] *Gloria,* V, p. 603.
[263] *Gloria,* VI, p. 13.
[264] *Gloria,* VI, p. 18.
[265] *Gloria,* VI, p. 32.
[266] *Gloria,* VI, p. 79.
[267] *Gloria,* VI, p. 189.
[268] *Gloria,* VI, p. 262.
[269] *Gloria,* VI, p. 262.
[270] *Gloria,* VI, p. 325.
[271] *Gloria,* VI, pp. 350-351*.
[272] *Gloria,* VI, pp. 361-362.
[273] *Gloria,* VII, p. 31.
[274] Cf. *Gloria,* VII, p. 97.
[275] *Gloria*, VII*,* p. 136.
[276] *Gloria,* VII*,* p. 168.
[277] *Gloria,* VII*,* p. 197.
[278] *Gloria,* VII, p. 198.
[279] Cf. *Gloria,* I.
[280] *Gloria,* VII, p. 315.
[281] *Theodramática,* I, p. 22.
[282] Cf. *Theodramática,* I, p. 61.

[283] *Theodramática,* I, p. 242.
[284] *Theodramática,* I, p. 399.
[285] Cf. *Theodramática,* I, p. 465.
[286] Cf. *Theodramática,* I, pp. 465-471.
[287] *Theodramática,* I, p. 609.
[288] *Theodramática,* I, p. 611.
[289] *Theodramática,* I, p. 627.
[290] Needless to say, this volume is filled with abundant quotations, passages and examples from dramatic literature, which make it a very pleasant and formative read.
[291] *Theodramática,* II, p. 13.
[292] Cf. *Theodramática,* II, p. 15.
[293] *Theodramática,* II, p. 39. Cf. *Theodramática,* II, pp. 50-51.
[294] *Theodramática,* II, p. 53*.
[295] *Theodramática,* II, p. 159.
[296] *Theodramática,* II, p. 178.
[297] *Theodramática,* II, p. 261.
[298] *Theodramática,* II, p. 290.
[299] *Theodramática,* II, pp. 330-331.
[300] *Theodramática,* II, p. 388. It deals with some types of post-Christian gnosticisms and titanisms. Cf. *Theodramática,* II, p. 388-400.
[301] *Theodramática,* III, p. 19.
[302] *Theodramática,* III, p. 44.
[303] *Theodramática,* III, p. 67.
[304] Cf. *Theodramática,* III, p. 72.
[305] *Theodramática,* III, p. 110.
[306] *Theodramática,* III, p. 119.
[307] *Theodramática,* III, p. 143.
[308] *Theodramática,* III, pp. 193-194.
[309] *Theodramática,* III, p. 243.
[310] Cf. *Theodramática,* III, p. 250.
[311] Cf. Adrienne von Speyr, *Teología de los sexos*, Ediciones San Juan, Madrid 2018.
[312] *Theodramática,* III, p. 295.
[313] *Theodramática,* III, p. 308.
[314] Cf. *Theodramática,* III, pp. 385-386.
[315] Cf. *Theodramática,* III, pp. 372-374.
[316] *Theodramática,* III, p. 425.
[317] Cf. *Theodramática,* III, p. 466.
[318] *Theodramática,* IV, p. 474.
[319] *Theodramática,* IV, p. 15.
[320] Cf. *Theodramática,* IV, p. 25.
[321] Cf. *Theodramática,* IV, p. 202.
[322] *Theodramática,* IV, p. 209*.
[323] Cf. *Theodramática,* IV, pp. 217-221.
[324] Cf. *Theodramática,* IV, pp. 322-325.
[325] Cf. *Theodramática,* IV, pp. 363-364.
[326] Cf. *Theodramática,* IV, p. 399.
[327] Cf. *Theodramática,* IV, p. 443.
[328] *Theodramática,* V, p. 15.
[329] Cf. *Theodramática,* V, p. 55.

[330] *Theodramática,* V, p. 209.
[331] *Theodramática,* V, p. 211.
[332] Cf. *Theodramática,* V, p. 316.
[333] *Theodramática,* V, p. 309.
[334] *Theodramática,* V, p. 317.
[335] Cf. *Theodramática,* V, p. 380.
[336] *Theodramática,* V, p. 489.
[337] *Theodramática,* V, p. 502.
[338] *Theodramática,* V, p. 502.
[339] *Theology,* I, p. 11.
[340] *Theology,* I, p. 37.
[341] *Theology,* I, p. 39.
[342] *Theology,* I, p. 58.
[343] *Theology,* I, p. 83.
[344] *Theology,* I, p. 109*.
[345] *Theology,* I, p. 134.
[346] *Theology,* I, p. 135.
[347] *Theology,* I, p. 134.
[348] *Theology,* I, p. 197.
[349] *Theology,* I, p. 201.
[350] *Theology,* I, p. 204.
[351] Cf. *Theologica,* I, p. 225.
[352] *Theology,* I, p. 239.
[353] *Theology,* I, p. 249.
[354] *Theology,* I, p. 261.
[355] *Theologica,* II, pp. 15-16.
[356] *Theology,* II, p. 17.
[357] *Theology,* II, p. 39.
[358] *Theology,* II, p. 31.
[359] *Theology,* II, p. 39.
[360] *Theology,* II, p. 67.
[361] *Theology,* II, p. 69.
[362] *Theology,* II, p. 125.
[363] *Theology,* II, p. 150.
[364] *Theology,* II, p. 173.
[365] *Theology,* II, p. 275.
[366] *Theology,* II, p. 285.
[367] Cf. *Theologica,* II, pp. 275; 332; 348.
[368] *Theology,* III, p. 109.
[369] *Theology,* III, p. 111.
[370] *Theology,* III, p. 143.
[371] *Theology,* III, p. 176.
[372] *Theologica,* III, pp. 217-218.
[373] Cf. *Theologica,* III, p. 412.
[374] Cf. *Theology,* III, p. 437.
[375] *Theology,* III, p. 444.
[376] *Epilogue,* p. 9.
[377] *Epilogue,* p. 9.
[378] *Epilogue,* p. 15*.

[379] *Epilogue,* p. 15.
[380] *Epilogue,* p. 43.
[381] *Epilogue,* p. 45.
[382] *Epilogue,* p. 46.
[383] *Epilogue,* p. 84.
[384] *Epilogue,* p. 117.
[385] This chapter had the collaboration of Magister Marcela Aranda Escobar, in addition to the suggestions and contributions of the St. John Community of the Balthasar Archive in Basel.
[386] The proceedings of two congresses held on this topic are available in Spanish: *Hans Urs von Balthasar y Adrienne von Speyr: una misión en común. II Congreso Fe Cristiana y servicio al Mundo* (Proceedings, Madrid, March 10-11, 2007), Fundación Maior, Madrid 2008; *La misión de Hans Urs von Balthasar y Adrienne von Speyr en el inicio del tercer milenio* (Congress Proceedings, Puebla [Mexico], November 17-18, 2007), Fundación Maior, Madrid 2008.
[387] Balthasar explains this in his work *Unser Auftrag...*, op. cit., written -explicitly- to make it known that the Community of St. John is precisely a joint work of both.
[388] Fundamental to this are the two works by Balthasar recommended at the end of the book in the "Suggested Bibliography" for chapter III: *Unser Auftrag...,* op. cit. and *Una primera mirada a Adrienne von Speyr,* Ediciones San Juan, Madrid 2012.
[389] On the different positions in this regard, see the good article by Jacques Servais, "Per una valutazione dell'influsso di Adrienne von Speyr su Hans Urs von Balthasar," in *Rivista Teologica di Lugano* 6 (1/2001), pp. 67-89, especially pp. 68-74.
[390] Cf. Servais, "Per una valutazione...", op. cit., pp. 77-80.
[391] Balthasar, *Zu seinem Werk,* op. cit. p. 76.
[392] Balthasar, *A First Look...,* op. cit., pp. 13-14*.
[393] Guadarrama, Madrid 1960 (original German 1956). The others mentioned therein have already been cited.
[394] Balthasar, *Zu seinem Werk,* op. cit., pp. 90-91.
[395] Balthasar, *Unser Auftrag...,* op. cit., p. 11.
[396] Ibid., p. 61.
[397] Ibid., pp. 13-14.
[398] Ibid., pp. 14-15.
[399] Cf. ibid., p. 14.
[400] Paola Ricci Sindoni, "Adrienne *von* Speyr e Hans Urs von Balthasar: tracce di un incontro," in Id. *Storia di una esistenza teologica,* Società Editrice Internazionale, Torino 1996, pp. 19-32, here p. 19.
[401] The emblematic case is *The Beatles*.
[402] *Estados de vida del cristiano,* Ediciones Encuentro, Madrid 1994, pp. 338-339 (original German 1977).
[403] Balthasar, *Unser Auftrag...,* op. cit., p. 97.
[404] Albus, "Spirit and Fire...", op. cit., pp. 118-119*.
[405] Cf. Balthasar, *Unser Auftrag...,* op. cit., pp. 50-53.
[406] Cf. Balthasar, *Examine Everything...,* op. cit., p. 78.
[407] Balthasar, *Unser Auftrag...,* op. cit., p. 66.
[408] Balthasar, *A First Look...,* op. cit., p. 43.
[409] Ibid., p. 13.
[410] Cf. ibid., p. 12; Balthasar, *Unser Auftrag...,* op. cit. p. 47.
[411] Balthasar, *A First Look...,* op. cit., p. 33.
[412] Ibid., p. 58.

[413] Ibid., p. 59.

[414] Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Aus dem Leben der Kirche. Adrienne von Speyr (1902-1967). Die Miterfahrung der Passion und Gottverlassenheit," in *Geist und Leben* 58 (1/1985), pp. 61-66, here p. 61.

[415] Cf. "Das Problem der christlichen Prophetie. Niels Christian Hvidt im Gespräch mit Joseph Kardinal Ratzinger," in *Internationale katholische Zeitschrift Communio* 28 (1999), pp. 177-188.

[416] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Adrienne von Speyr und das Sakrament der Beichte,* Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1983 (Translation by Juan Sara for the Spanish edition of Ediciones San Juan, Madrid 2016, p. 3).

[417] Balthasar, *A First Look...,* op. cit., p. 91.

[418] Ibid., p. 92*.

[419] The commentaries on John, Mark, Revelation, Pastoral Letters, Ephesians, Colossians, 1 Corinthians, Isaiah, Job, Song of Songs stand out.

[420] Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Zur Einführung," in Adrienne von Speyr, *Apokalypse. Betrachtungen über die geheime Offenbarung,* Johannes Verlag Einsiedeln, Freiburg 42019, p. 8.

[421] Ibid., p. 9.

[422] Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Einleitung," in Adrienne von Speyr, *Kreuz und Hölle, I. Die Passionen* (Die Nachlasswerke III), Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1966, pp. 13-14.

[423] Servais, "Per una valutazione...", op. cit., p. 74.

[424] Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Einleitung," in Adrienne von Speyr, *Das Allerheiligenbuch*, I (Die Nachlasswerke I/1), Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1966, p. 21.

[425] Cf. Balthasar, "Zur Einführung," in Speyr, *Apokalypse...,* op. cit. p. 11.

[426] Servais, "Per una valutazione...", op. cit., p. 76.

427 Balthasar, *A First Look...,* op. cit., p. 43.
428 Balthasar, *Unser Auftrag...,* op. cit., p. 73.
429 Cf. Albus, "Spirit and Fire...", op. cit., p. 118.
430 Balthasar, *Unser Auftrag...,* op. cit., p. 62.
431 Cf. ibid., pp. 62-63.
432 Cf. ibid., p. 49.
433 Ibid., p. 64.
434 Ibid, p. 65. Cf. ibid, pp. 79-80.
435 Balthasar, *A First Look...,* op. cit., p. 12.
436 Balthasar, *Unser Auftrag...,* op. cit., p. 70.
437 Cf. Balthasar, *A First Look...,* op. cit., pp. 36-45.
438 Cf. Balthasar, *Zu seinem Werk,* op. cit., p. 90; Balthasar, *Examine Everything...,* op. cit., p. 78.
439 Balthasar, *Unser Auftrag...,* op. cit., p. 38. Cf. ibid., p. 47: "My theological training had an objective development and would one day prove to be a useful instrument for working together with her".
440 Balthasar, *A First Look...,* op. cit., p. 37.
441 Ibid., p. 45.
442 Adrienne von Speyr, *Die Magd des Herrn. Ein Marienbuch,* Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 31988; Id., *Die Welt des Gebetes,* Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 21992; Id., *Die Beichte,* Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 32016, respectively.
443 Cf. Balthasar, *A First Look...,* op. cit., pp. 51-110.
444 Balthasar, *Unser Auftrag...,* op. cit., p. 51.
445 Ibid., p. 52.
446 Ibid., p. 50.
447 Ibid., p. 33.
448 Rino Fisichella, "Hans Urs von Balthasar e Adrienne von Speyr. L'inseparabilità delle due opere," in *Rivista Internazionale di Teologia e Cultura Communio* 156 (1997), pp. 61-74, here p. 73.
449 Balthasar, *Unser Auftrag...,* op. cit., p. 50.
450 Cf. *Theologica,* II, pp. 275-276; 332-348.
451 Cf. *Theodramática,* IV, pp. 19-44.
452 *Theodramática,* V, p. 15. Cf. also Balthasar, *Adrienne von Speyr und das Sakrament...,* op. cit., pp. 7-8.
453 His complete bibliography (with available translations) can be consulted on the site of *Johannes Verlag Einsiedeln* (Freiburg in. Br.), which has edited all his work: http://www.johannes-verlag.de. Also on the site *Balthasar & Speyr:* https://balthasarspeyr.org/speyr-es/obras/.
454 Cf. Balthasar, *A First Look...,* op. cit., pp. 51-110.
455 Ibid., p. 51.
456 Cf. Balthasar, *Unser Auftrag...,* op. cit., pp. 45-50.
457 Her first book was precisely *The Handmaid of the Lord* (*Die Magd des Herrn...,* op. cit.).
458 Balthasar, *A First Look...,* op. cit., p. 52.
459 Ibid., p. 58.
460 Ibid., p. 52.
461 Ibid., p. 54.
462 Balthasar, *Unser Auftrag...,* op. cit., p. 54. In fact, one of Adrienne's central works is her great text *The Confession (Die Beichte...,* op. cit.).
463 Balthasar, *Unser Auftrag...,* op. cit., p. 54.

[464] Balthasar, *A First Look...,* op. cit., p. 60. On this he wrote his text *The Book of Obedience* (Adrienne von Speyr, *Das Buch vom Gehorsam,* Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 21993).

[465] Balthasar, *A First Look...,* op. cit., p. 62*.

[466] One of his most important works is precisely *The World of Prayer* (*Die Welt des Gebetes...,* op. cit.).

[467] Balthasar, *A First Look...,* op. cit., p. 63.

[468] Cf. ibid., pp. 63-64.

[469] Ibid., p. 65.

[470] She described all this in her book *Cross and Hell* (Speyr, *Kreuz und Hölle. I...,* op. cit.; Adrienne von Speyr, *Kreuz und Hölle. II. Auftragshöllen* (Die Nachlasswerke IV), Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1972).

[471] Balthasar, *A First Look...,* op. cit., p. 67.

[472] Balthasar, *Unser Auftrag...,* op. cit., pp. 54-55.

[473] Cf. ibid., pp. 55-61.

[474] Cf. her book *Teología de los sexos,* Ediciones San Juan, Madrid 2018 (Adrienne von Speyr, *Theologie der Geschlechter* [Die Nachlasswerke XII], Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1969).

[475] Hence her book *The Fish Net (*Adrienne von Speyr, *Das Fischernetz* [Die Nachlasswerke II], Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1969).

[476] He describes, in a brief overview for each, the prayer of the various well-known saints in *The Book of All Saints* (Speyr, *Das Allerheiligenbuch I...,* op. cit.; Adrienne von Speyr, *Das Allerheiligenbuch. II* [Die Nachlasswerke I/2], Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1977).

[477] On the subject he wrote *Subjective Mysticism* and *Objective Mysticism* (Adrienne von Speyr, *Das Wort und die Mystik. I. Subjektive Mystik* [Die Nachlasswerke V], Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1970; Id., *Das Wort und die Mystik. II. Objektive Mystik* [Die Nachlasswerke VI], Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1970).

[478] Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Adrienne's Charisms," in *Revista Proyectos* 30 (1998).

[479] Balthasar, "Einleitung," in Speyr, *Das Allerheiligenbuch, I...,* op. cit. p. 11.

[480] Balthasar, *Adrienne von Speyr und das Sakrament...,* op. cit.

[481] Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Einleitung," in Adrienne von Speyr, *Die katholischen Briefe, I. Der Jakobusbrief. Die Petrusbriefe,* Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1961, p. 21.

[482] Balthasar, "Einleitung," in Speyr, *Kreuz und Hölle, I...,* op. cit., p. 14. Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Geleitwort," in Adrienne von Speyr, *Sie folgten seinem Ruf. Berufung und Askese,* Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 32015, pp. 7-8.

[483] Balthasar, "Einleitung," in Speyr, *Das Allerheiligenbuch, I...,* op. cit., p. 11. Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Einleitung," in Adrienne von Speyr, *Die katholischen Briefe, I. Der Jakobusbrief. Die Petrusbriefe,* Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1961, p. 5.

[484] Balthasar, *Adrienne von Speyr und das Sakrament...,* op. cit.

[485] Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Vorwort", in Adrienne von Speyr, *Ignatiana* (Die Nachlasswerke XI), Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1974, p. 11. Cf. Balthasar, "Zur Einführung", in Speyr, *Apokalypse...,* op. cit., pp. 11-12.

[486] Balthasar, "Aus dem Leben der Kirche...," op. cit. p. 61.

[487] Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Vorwort," in Adrienne von Speyr, *Erde und Himmel, I. Einübungen* (Die Nachlasswerke VIII), Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1975, p. 8.

[488] Balthasar, "Einleitung," in Speyr, *Das Allerheiligenbuch, I...,* op. cit. p. 16.

[489] Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Einleitung," in Speyr, *Kreuz und Hölle. II...,* op. cit. pp. 10-12.

[490] Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Vorwort des Herausgebers," in Adrienne von Speyr, *Passion von innen,* Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1981, p. 7.

[491] Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Vorwort," in Adrienne von Speyr, *Korinther I,* Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1956, p. 6.

[492] Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Vorwort," in Adrienne von Speyr, *Kostet und seht. Ein theologisches Lesebuch,* Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1988, p. 13.
[493] Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Geleitwort," in Adrienne von Speyr, *Der Epheserbrief,* Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1985, p. 10.
[494] Balthasar, "Einleitung," in Speyr, *Das Allerheiligenbuch, I...,* op. cit. p. 32.
[495] Balthasar, *Adrienne von Speyr und das Sakrament...,* op. cit., p. 5.
[496] Balthasar, "Einleitung," in Speyr, *Das Allerheiligenbuch, I...,* op. cit. pp. 12-13.
[497] Ibid., pp. 30-31.
[498] Cf. Balthasar, *Unser Auftrag...,* op. cit., pp. 81-97.
[499] Ibid., p. 81.
[500] Ibid., pp. 90-92.
[501] Ibid., p. 92.
[502] Ibid., p. 82.
[503] Op. cit.
[504] Op. cit.
[505] Op. cit.
[506] Balthasar, *Unser Auftrag...,* op. cit., p. 83.
[507] Op. cit.
[508] Op. cit.
[509] Balthasar, *Unser Auftrag...,* op. cit., p. 84.
[510] Ibid., pp. 95-96.
[511] Ibid., p. 93.
[512] Ibid., p. 87.
[513] Ibid., p. 89.
[514] Cf. ibid., p. 91.
[515] Op. cit.
[516] Balthasar, *Unser Auftrag...,* op. cit., p. 89.
[517] Op. cit.
[518] Op. cit.
[519] Cf. Balthasar, *Unser Auftrag...,* op. cit., p. 84.
[520] Ibid., p. 82.
[521] *Thomas und die Charismatik,* Johannes Verlag Einsiedeln, Freiburg 21996.
[522] Balthasar, *Unser Auftrag...*, op. cit., p. 88.
[523] Op. cit.
[524] Balthasar, *Unser Auftrag...*, op. cit., p. 91.
[525] Cf. *Theodramática,* V, pp. 210-243.
[526] *Theodramática,* V, p. 210.
[527] Cf. *Epilogue,* p. 9.
[528] Cf. *Gloria,* I, pp. 116-117.
[529] Cf. Giovanni Marchesi, "Gesù Cristo, irradiazione della Gloria," in *Communio* 203-204 (2005), pp. 86-104, here pp. 92-93.
[530] Balthasar, *Unser Auftrag...*, op. cit., p. 82. Cf. *Epilogue,* pp. 53-55.
[531] *Gloria,* I, p. 16.
[532] *Gloria,* I, p. 15*.
[533] *Gloria,* I, p. 110.
[534] *Gloria,* I, p. 111.
[535] Cf. *Epilogue,* pp. 53-72.
[536] *Gloria,* I, p. 111.
[537] *Gloria,* I, p. 25.

[538] *Gloria,* I, p. 27.
[539] *Gloria,* I, p. 31.
[540] *Gloria,* I, p. 34.
[541] *Gloria,* I, p. 31*.
[542] *Gloria,* I, p. 37.
[543] *Gloria,* I, p. 112*.
[544] *Gloria,* I, p. 112.
[545] *Gloria,* I, p. 113*.
[546] Cf. *Gloria,* I, p. 47.
[547] *Gloria,* I, p. 68.
[548] Cf. *Gloria,* I, p. 23.
[549] *Gloria,* I, p. 136.
[550] *Gloria,* I, p. 123.
[551] Cf. *Gloria,* I, pp. 130-131.
[552] *Gloria,* I, p. 141.
[553] *Gloria,* I, p. 143.
[554] *Gloria,* I, p. 146*.
[555] *Gloria,* I, p. 163.
[556] *Gloria,* I, p. 174.
[557] *Gloria,* I, p. 195.
[558] *Gloria,* I, p. 201.
[559] *Gloria,* I, p. 202.
[560] *Gloria,* I, p. 207*.
[561] *Gloria,* I, p. 220.
[562] *Gloria,* I, p. 227.
[563] *Gloria,* I, p. 272.
[564] *Gloria,* I, p. 273.
[565] *Gloria,* I, p. 323.
[566] *Gloria,* I, p. 323.
[567] *Gloria,* I, p. 381.
[568] *Gloria,* I, p. 382.
[569] *Gloria,* I, p. 383.
[570] *Gloria,* I, p. 387.
[571] *Gloria,* I, p. 388*.
[572] *Gloria,* I, p. 393.
[573] *Gloria,* I, p. 394.
[574] *Gloria,* I, pp. 400-401.
[575] *Gloria,* I, p. 402.
[576] *Gloria,* I, p. 410.
[577] *Gloria,* I, p. 415.
[578] *Gloria,* I, p. 416.
[579] *Gloria,* I, p. 417*.
[580] Cf. Larry Chapp, "Revelation," in Edward T. Oakes - David Moss (eds.), The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs Von Balthasar. Oakes - David Moss (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs Von Balthasar,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2004, pp. 11-23, here p. 14.
[581] *Gloria,* I, p. 420.
[582] *Gloria,* I, p. 424.
[583] *Gloria,* I, p. 428.

[584] *Gloria,* I, p. 431.
[585] Cf. Chapp, "Revelation", op. cit., p. 15.
[586] *Gloria,* I, p. 453.
[587] *Gloria,* I, p. 432*.
[588] *Gloria,* I, p. 471.
[589] *Gloria,* I, p. 534.
[590] *Gloria,* I, p. 535.
[591] *Gloria,* I, p. 536.
[592] *Gloria,* I, p. 539.
[593] *Gloria,* I, p. 540.
[594] *Gloria,* I, p. 542.
[595] Cf. Chapp, "Revelation," op. cit. p. 21.
[596] *Gloria,* I, p. 574.
[597] Cf. *Gloria,* I, p. 575.
[598] *Gloria,* I, pp. 586-587.
[599] Cf. *Epilogue,* p. 9.
[600] *Epilogue,* p. 15.
[601] Cf. *Epilogue,* p. 16.
[602] *Epilogue,* pp. 19-20.
[603] *Epilogue,* p. 23.
[604] *Epilogue,* pp. 28-29.
[605] *Epilogue,* pp. 35-36.
[606] Cf. *Epilogue,* p. 36.
[607] *Epilogue,* p. 39.
[608] Cf. Rino Fisichella, "Fundamentaltheologisches bei Hans Urs von Balthasar," in Karl Lehmann - Walter Kasper (eds.), *Hans Urs von Balthasar: Gestalt und Werk,* Verlag für christliche Literatur Communio, Köln 1989, pp. 298-311.
[609] Cf. Chapp, "Revelation", op. cit., pp. 17-19.
[610] Cf. Rodrigo Polanco, *Hans Urs von Balthasar II. Aspectos centrales de su Trilogía,* Ediciones Encuentro, Madrid 2021.
[611] *Theodramática,* I, p. 14*.
[612] *Theodramática,* I, p. 14.
[613] *Theodramática,* I, p. 19.
[614] Aidan Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth. A Guide Through Balthasar's Dramatics,* The Catholic University of America Press, Washington DC 2000, p. 4.
[615] *Theodramática,* I, p. 20.
[616] *Theodramática,* II, p. 13.
[617] *Theodramática,* I, p. 21.
[618] *Theodramática,* I, p. 84.
[619] Cf. Alois, Haas, "Hans Urs von Balthasar. Theatricality and Postmodernity. 'Hans Urs von Balthasar's Principle of Theatricality,'" in Cecilia I. Avenatti de Palumbo, *Languages of God for the 21st Century. Aesthetics, theater and literature as theological imaginaries,* Edições Subiaco, Juiz de Fora 2007, pp. 464-482, here pp. 466-472.
[620] *Theodramática,* I, p. 22.
[621] *Theodramática,* II, p. 15.
[622] *Theodramática,* I, p. 22.
[623] *Theodramática,* I, pp. 22-23*.
[624] Cf. Balthasar, "An Attempt to Summarize...," op. cit. p. 287.
[625] *Theodramática,* II, p. 14.

[626] Cf. Gerard O'Hanlon, "Theological Dramatics," in Bede McGregor - Thomas Norris (eds.), *The Beauty of Christ. An Introduction to the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar,* T&T Clark, Edinburgh 1994, p. 94.

[627] Cf. Balthasar, "An Attempt to Summarize...," op. cit. p. 286.

[628] Cf. O'Hanlon, "Theological Dramatics," op. cit., p. 94.

[629] *Theodramática,* I, pp. 119-120.

[630] Cf. Balthasar, *Zu seinem Werk,* op. cit., p. 67.

[631] Cf. Ben Quash, "Theo-drama," in Edward T. Oakes - David Moss (eds.), The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar. Oakes - David Moss (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2004, pp. 143-157, here pp. 145-147.

[632] *Theodramatics,* II, p. 16

[633] Cf. the good study on this by Ben Quash, *Theology and the Drama of History,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2005.

[634] Balthasar, *Zu seinem Werk,* op. cit. p. 76.

[635] Quash, "Theo-drama," op. cit. pp. 145-146.

[636] Quash, *Theology...,* op. cit., p. 15.

[637] Balthasar, *Zu seinem Werk,* op. cit. p. 10.

[638] Cf. *Theodramática,* I, pp. 54-68.

[639] Cf. *Theodramática,* I, pp. 560-571.

[640] *Theodramática,* I, p. 55.

[641] Cf. Quash, *Theology...*, op. cit., pp. 13-14 and 39-46.

[642] *Theodramática,* I, p. 65.

[643] *Theodramática,* I, pp. 65-66.

[644] *Theodramática,* I, p. 129.

[645] Cf. particularly, *Theodramática,* I, pp. 129-250.

[646] *Theodramática,* I, p. 182.

[647] Cf. Quash, "Theo-drama", op. cit., pp. 146-147.

[648] Balthasar, *Zu seinem Werk,* op. cit. p. 20.

[649] Balthasar, "Einleitung," in Speyr, *Kreuz und Hölle*, I..., op. cit. pp. 13-14.

[650] Ibid., pp. 11-12.

[651] Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Vorwort," in Adrienne von Speyr, *Isaias. Erklärung ausgewählter Texte,* Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1958, p. 8.

[652] Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Vorwort des Herausgebers," in Adrienne von Speyr, *Passion von Innen,* Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1981, p. 7.

[653] Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Allgemeine Einleitung in die Nachlassbände," in Adrienne von Speyr, *Das Allerheiligenbuch. I. Teil* (Die Nachlasswerke I), Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1966, p. 21.

[654] Haas, "Hans Urs von Balthasar...," op. cit. p. 470.

[655] Ibid., pp. 471-472.

[656] Cf. *Theodramática,* I, pp. 27-50.

[657] *Theodramática,* I, p. 28.

[658] *Theodramática,* I, pp. 35-36.

[659] *Theodramática,* I, p. 43.

[660] Cf. *Theodramática,* I, pp. 242-250.

[661] *Theodramática,* I, p. 242.

[662] *Theodramática,* I, p. 245.

[663] *Theodramática,* I, p. 248.

[664] Cf. *Theodramática,* I, p. 251.

[665] Cf. *Theodramática,* I, pp. 251-259.
[666] *Theodramática,* I, p. 252*.
[667] Cf. *Theodramática,* I, pp. 332-399.
[668] *Theodramática,* I, pp. 332-333.
[669] *Theodramática,* I, p. 341.
[670] *Theodramática,* I, p. 357.
[671] *Theodramática,* I, p. 399.
[672] *Theodramática,* I, p. 408.
[673] Cf. *Theodramática,* I, pp. 259-292.
[674] Cf. *Theodramática,* I, pp. 293-309.
[675] *Theodramática,* I, p. 260*.
[676] *Theodramática,* I, p. 286.
[677] *Theodramática,* I, p. 300*.
[678] Cf. *Theodramática,* I, pp. 465-630.
[679] *Theodramática,* I, p. 465.
[680] *Theodramática,* I, p. 465*.
[681] *Theodramática,* I, p. 466, citing Maurice Blondel, *L'action,* 1893, p. 338.
[682] *Theodramática,* I, p. 466, citing Henri Bouillard, *Blondel et le Christianisme,* Seuil, Paris 1961, p. 24.
[683] *Theodramática,* I, p. 467.
[684] *Theodramática,* I, p. 470.
[685] *Theodramática,* I, p. 476.
[686] Cf. *Theodramática,* I, p. 487.
[687] *Theodramática,* I, p. 504.
[688] *Theodramática,* I, p. 513.
[689] *Theodramática,* I, p. 533.
[690] *Theodramática,* I, p. 540.
[691] *Theodramática,* I, p. 541.
[692] *Theodramática,* I, pp. 563-564.
[693] *Theodramática,* I, p. 571.
[694] *Theodramática,* I, p. 580*.
[695] *Theodramática,* I, p. 581.
[696] *Theodramática,* I, p. 587.
[697] Cf. *Theodramática,* I, p. 607.
[698] *Theodramática,* I, p. 611.
[699] *Theodramática,* I, p. 627*.
[700] *Theodramática,* I, p. 628.
[701] Cf. Polanco, *Hans Urs von Balthasar II* ..., op. cit.
[702] Cf. Quash, "Theo-drama", op. cit., pp. 193-195.
[703] Cf. O'Hanlon, "Theological Dramatics," op. cit., pp. 106-111.
[704] *Theodramática*, III, pp. 396-397*.
[705] Cf. "Gespräch mit H. U. von Balthasar" (broadcast by Erwin Koller on *Schweizer Fernsehen*, April 20, 1984, in the program "Zeugen des Jahrhunderts").
[706] Cf. Peter Henrici, "Zur Philosophie Hans Urs von *Balthasars*," in id. *Aspekte seiner Sendung,* Johannes Verlag Einsiedeln, Freiburg 2008, pp. 75-101, here p. 75.
[707] Cf. *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele. Studien zu einer Lehre von letzten Haltungen,* 3 vols., Johannes Verlag Einsiedeln, Freiburg 1998; Alois Haas, "Zum Geleit," in ibid, I, pp. XXV-XLVIII.
[708] Cf. Balthasar, *Examine Everything...,* op. cit., p. 11.

[709] Cf. *Geist und Feuer...,* op. cit.; *Parole et Mystère...,* op. cit.; *Présence et Pensée...,* op. cit.; *Der versiegelte Quell...,* op. cit.; *Kosmische Liturgie...,* op. cit.; *Die Gnostische Centurien...*, op. cit., respectively.

[710] Henrici, "Zur Philosophie...", op. cit., p. 76.

[711] Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Patristics, Scholasticism and Us," in *Toletana* 24 (2011), pp. 55-102, here pp. 80-87.

[712] Cf. Fergus Kerr, "Balthasar and metaphysics," in Edward T. Oakes - David Moss (eds.), The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar. Oakes - David Moss (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2004, pp. 224-238, here p. 227.

[713] "Christenleben als Philosophie," in *Catholica (Münster)* 14 (1960), pp. 291-304; later published as "Filosofía, cristianismo, monacato," in *Sponsa Verbi. Ensayos Teológicos,* II, Ediciones Encuentro, Madrid 22001, pp. 335-371.

[714] Balthasar, "Philosophy, Christianity...," op. cit., pp. 335 and 336, respectively.

[715] "Dialoguing with myself on his words [those of a Christian elder], I discovered that it [Christianity] was the only safe and useful philosophy" (Justin, *Dialogue against Tryphon* 8,1) (Philippe Bobichon, *Dialogue avec Tryphon*. Édition critique, vol. I, Saint-Paul, Fribourg 2003, pp. 204-205).

[716] Balthasar, "Philosophy, Christianity...," op. cit. p. 338.

[717] Ibid., p. 339.

[718] Cf. ibid., p. 341.

[719] Balthasar, "An Attempt to Summarize...," op. cit. p. 285.

[720] Balthasar, "Patristics, Scholasticism...," op. cit.

[721] Kerr, "Balthasar and metaphysics," op. cit. p. 227.

[722] Balthasar, "Patristics, Scholasticism...," op. cit. pp. 59-60.

[723] Henrici, "Zur Philosophie...", op. cit., p. 80.

[724] Balthasar, "Patristics, Scholasticism...," op. cit. pp. 62-63.

[725] Ibid., p. 67.

[726] Ibid., p. 74.

[727] Ibid., p. 77.

[728] Ibid., p. 80.

[729] Ibid., p. 100.

[730] Cf. Henrici, "Zur Philosophie...", op. cit., pp. 83-84.

[731] Ibid., p. 84.

[732] *Theology,* I, p. 11.

[733] *Theology,* I, p. 12.

[734] *Gloria,* V, p. 595.

[735] *Theology,* I, p. 17.

[736] *Theology,* I, p. 18.

[737] *Gloria,* IV, p. 23.

[738] Cf. "Von den Aufgaben der katholischen Philosophie in der Zeit," in *Annalen der Philosophischen Gesellschaft der Innerschweiz (Werd bei Eschenz)* 3 (2/3 Dezember/Januar 1946/47), pp. 1-38, edited again in Alois Haas (ed.), *Studienausgaben Hans Urs von Balthasar,* vol. 4, Johannes Verlag Einsiedeln, Freiburg i. Brsg. 1998.

[739] Balthasar, "Von den Aufgaben...," op. cit., in Haas, *Studienausgaben...,* op. cit., p. 76.

[740] G. W. F. Hegel, *Werke,* vol. XII, Verlag von Duncker & Humbolt, Berlin 1832-1845, p. 156, quoted in *Gloria,* V, p. 535.

[741] Emmanuel J. Bauer, "Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988). His philosophical work," in Cecilia I. Avenatti de Palumbo, *Languages of God for the 21st Century. Aesthetics, theater and*

literature as theological imaginaries, Edições Subiaco, Juiz de Fora 2007, pp. 742-776, here p. 751.

[742] Cf. *Gloria,* IV, p. 18.

[743] Cf. *Gloria,* IV, p. 20.

[744] *Theology,* I, p. 22.

[745] *Gloria,* IV, p. 20.

[746] *Gloria,* IV, p. 23.

[747] *Gloria,* IV, p. 22.

[748] *Gloria,* IV, pp. 31-32.

[749] *Theology,* I, p. 33.

[750] Henrici, "Zur Philosophie...", op. cit., p. 78.

[751] *Theology,* I, p. 23.

[752] Bauer, "Hans Urs von Balthasar...," op. cit. p. 756.

[753] *Theology,* I, p. 25.

[754] *Theology,* I, p. 28.

[755] *Theology,* I, p. 31.

[756] *Theology,* I, p. 32.

[757] *Theology,* I, p. 33.

[758] Op. cit.

[759] Cf. *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele...*, op. cit.

[760] Bauer, "Hans Urs von Balthasar...," op. cit. p. 751.

[761] Balthasar, "Acknowledgment of the Awardee...," op. cit. pp. 420-421.

[762] Bauer, "Hans Urs von Balthasar...," op. cit. p. 753.

[763] Cf. ibid., pp. 751-755.

[764] Op. cit.

[765] In Johannes Feiner - Magnus Löhrer (eds.), *Mysterium salutis. Manual de teología como historia de la salvación,* II, Cristiandad, Madrid 1969, pp. 29-52.

[766] Balthasar, *Das Ganze im Fragment...,* op. cit.

[767] Op. cit.

[768] *Gloria,* IV, p. 23.

[769] "Regagner une philosophie à partir de la théologie," in *Pour une philosophie chrétienne. Philosophie et théologie,* Lethielleux, Paris 1983, pp. 175-187.

[770] Balthasar, "Regagner une philosophie...", op. cit. p. 181.

[771] Ibid., pp. 182-183.

[772] *Gloria,* IV, p. 255.

[773] *Gloria,* IV, p. 256.

[774] *Gloria,* IV, p. 256.

[775] *Gloria,* IV, p. 256.

[776] *Gloria,* IV, p. 255.

[777] *Gloria,* IV, p. 262.

[778] *Gloria,* IV, p. 263.

[779] *Gloria,* IV, p. 264.

[780] *Gloria,* IV, p. 266.

[781] *Gloria,* IV, p. 267.

[782] *Gloria,* IV, p. 272.

[783] *Gloria,* IV, p. 275.

[784] *Gloria,* IV, p. 276*.

[785] *Gloria,* IV, pp. 277-278.

[786] Cf. *Gloria,* IV, pp. 201-368.

[787] Cf. *Gloria,* IV, pp. 261-262.
[788] Cf. *Gloria,* IV, pp. 264-273; Henrici, "Zur Philosophie...," op. cit. pp. 86-87.
[789] Henrici, "Zur Philosophie...", op. cit., p. 87.
[790] *Gloria,* V, p. 525.
[791] *Gloria,* V, pp. 525-526.
[792] *Gloria,* V, p. 526.
[793] Cf. *Gloria,* V, p. 531.
[794] *Gloria,* V, p. 534.
[795] *Gloria,* V, p. 535*.
[796] Cf. *Gloria,* V, p. 536.
[797] Cf. *Gloria,* V, p. 539.
[798] Cf. Balthasar, "An Attempt to Summarize...," op. cit., pp. 286-287.
[799] *Gloria,* IV, p. 353*.
[800] *Gloria,* IV, p. 354.
[801] *Gloria,* IV, p. 355.
[802] *Gloria,* IV, p. 356.
[803] *Gloria,* IV, p. 358.
[804] *Gloria,* IV, pp. 360-361.
[805] *Gloria,* IV, p. 362.
[806] *Gloria,* IV, p. 363.
[807] *Gloria,* IV, p. 363.
[808] *Gloria,* IV, p. 365*.
[809] *Gloria,* IV, p. 368.
[810] *Gloria,* V, p. 399*.
[811] *Gloria,* V, p. 400.
[812] *Gloria,* V, p. 401.
[813] *Gloria,* V, pp. 402-403.
[814] *Gloria,* V, p. 403.
[815] *Gloria,* V, p. 404.
[816] *Gloria,* V, p. 406.
[817] *Gloria,* V, p. 412.
[818] *Gloria,* V, p. 413.
[819] *Gloria,* V, p. 413.
[820] *Gloria,* V, p. 414.
[821] Op. cit.
[822] Henrici, "Zur Philosophie...", op. cit., p. 89.
[823] Balthasar, *Zu seinem Werk,* op. cit. p. 49.
[824] Op. cit.
[825] Op. cit.
[826] Balthasar, *Zu seinem Werk,* op. cit., p. 37.
[827] Henrici, "Zur Philosophie...", op. cit., pp. 92-93.
[828] Cf. Chapp, "Revelation," op. cit., pp. 15-17.
[829] *Gloria,* V, p. 563.
[830] *Gloria,* V, p. 564.
[831] *Gloria,* V, p. 565.
[832] Cf. what we have already said in chapter I, when explaining the structure of Balthasar's thought.
[833] Cf. *Gloria,* V, p. 566.
[834] *Gloria,* V, p. 567.

[835] *Gloria,* V, p. 568.

[836] *Gloria,* V, pp. 568-569.

[837] *Gloria,* V, p. 570.

[838] *Gloria,* V, p. 571.

[839] *Gloria,* V, p. 573.

[840] *Gloria,* V, pp. 573-574*.

[841] Above all, *Homo Abyssus: Das Wagnis der Seinsfrage* (= *Man, an unfathomable mystery. The Adventure of the Question of Being,* op. cit.

[842] *Gloria,* V, pp. 574-575.

[843] *Gloria,* V, p. 577*.

[844] *Gloria,* V, p. 580.

[845] *Gloria,* V, p. 580.

[846] *Gloria,* V, p. 586.

[847] *Gloria,* V, p. 595.

[848] Cf. *Gloria,* V, p. 603.

[849] Op. cit.

[850] Balthasar, "An Attempt to Summarize...," op. cit. p. 284.

[851] Cf. ibid., p. 285.

[852] Balthasar, "An Attempt to Summarize...," op. cit. p. 284.

[853] Cf. Polanco, *Hans Urs von Balthasar II...*, op. cit.


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Like every crisis, the current one "forces us to ask ourselves new questions and demands new or old answers, but in any case direct judgments, not pre-established ones" (Hannah Arendt). It is, therefore, an invitation to open ourselves to others and, for Christians, an opportunity to verify the capacity of faith to respond to new challenges and to maintain an open dialogue in the public sphere. Julián Carrón, currently in charge of Communion and Liberation, one of the most relevant ecclesial realities of the last decades, reflects on our current situation of "epochal change". In this book, he proposes how the Christian proposal can be attractive for today's man and contribute to the construction of spaces of freedom and coexistence in our pluralistic society. Access to truth is only possible through freedom. History is the space of dialogue in freedom, "which does not mean that it is an empty space, deserted of life proposals. Because one does not live from nothing. No one can stand, have a constructive relationship with reality, without something worth living for, without a hypothesis of meaning".

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